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DEADWOOD DICK'S DUCATS; or, Rainy Days in the Diggings.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, "DENVER DOLL" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.



BEARING UPON ITS ROOF FOUR PALE AND HORRIFIED HUMAN BEINGS.

Deadwood Dick's Ducats;

OR,

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CHAPTER I.

THE "PLAYED-OUT" PROSPECTOR.

"DAVE! Dave!"

A clear, ringing voice uttered the cry, and its tones reverberated along the mountain walls of the rugged gulch, with a mocking, weird echo—

"Dave! Dave!"

There came no other answer than the re-echo.

The clouds overhead looked dark and threatening, predicting that the first inauguration of the inevitable autumnal wet season was at hand—that soppy, soaking, steadily-pouring period, when placer miners grow "down in the mouth" over their inability to do much else than sit around the taverns and drink bad liquor and play cards, thereby varying the monotony now and then, by cleaning up weapons;—a period when the winds blow high and fierce, and when the mountain rivulets become fierce and roaring torrents, and sweep away toward the sea all obstacles coming within their reach, that a giant power could move.

Down in the wild, bowlder-sown gulch, where there was little foliage or verdure, except now and then a scrub fir or some rank-growing, obnoxious weed, stood a scrawny-looking *burro*, of sadate aspect, laden with a pack, which evidently contained the paraphernalia of a miner or prospector.

Beside the *burro*, and leaning with one arm upon its back, was the person who had uttered the call.

Not a man, but a girl, whose age was certainly not much over eighteen, and whose figure, though slightly inclined to robustness, was yet symmetrical and graceful. In face she was not to say handsome, but, as a jury would agree, "just ordinary." This face was round, healthy and pleasant, with a sharp pair of hazel eyes, a pleasing mouth and fine nose, while her forehead was, for the better part, hidden beneath a shaggy mass of shingled "bangs."

A white sombrero was set jauntily upon her head, from which a wealth of hair flowed in ripples over her shoulders.

She was attired in a blue woolen dress, that reached slightly below her knees, there met by a pair of fringed leggings and dainty moccasins.

A belt about her waist contained a couple of revolvers, and her right hand supported a Springfield repeating rifle of elegant workmanship.

There was an anxious expression upon her face as she received no answer to her cry, and she glanced more than once apprehensively at the sky.

"I wonder why Dave don't come?" she murmured, as the shadows of approaching nightfall began to increase in the gulch. "This narrow defile is no enviable camping-spot, with a deluge of rain impending, as it appears to receive the drainage of several other gorges. A hard rain, therefore, would make this rugged bottom the bed of a frightful torrent, in which no horse and rider could live. If Dave does not return soon I shall have to seek higher ground. I cannot see what detains him."

Ten minutes passed.

The heavens grew densely black, and the very atmosphere was impregnated with the forewarnings of the coming storm. Then, gradually, a grayish center appeared in the black mass, tinged with a purplish shade.

"If there isn't a regular waterspout, it'll be mighty queer!" the girl muttered, tightening the *burro's* belly-band. "By jingo, Jerry, it looks like we ain't goin' to pass a very comfortable night, eh?"

As if understanding her words, the *burro* laid back its ears, and squealed, viciously, while it shook one hind hoof, suggestively.

"I know it—I've a mind to kick myself!" the mistress declared, grimly.

"That confounded Dave will be the means of getting us into trouble, yet, with his laziness and blundering."

As she was speaking, a footstep sounded, just in her rear, and Dutch Dave made his appearance.

He was a well-formed, athletic looking fellow, of two-and-twenty, with a merry face

and twinkling eyes, in which the Dutch of his ancestors was photographed.

His hair was of a light reddish color, and surmounted by a little cap; in other details his costume was coarse and not unlike that of the every-day prospector.

He carried a rifle and a brace of birds, which he had evidently recently shot.

"Well! well! are you back, at last?" the girl demanded, as she turned at his approach.

"Yah! I coom yust so quick as I shoot dose birds!" Dutch Dave replied. "You got in some hurry, all de vile, eh?"

"Of course I did! Don't you see it's goin' to pour down, soon?"

"Yah! I opserve dot, purty quick, a couple two or dree times. Don't hurt nopody, a leedle vater, don'd. I'd makes a veller grow, dey say."

"Nonsense. Like as not this ravine will be neck-full of a furious flood, inside of an hour. I don't see as we can go any further, to-night, and the main thing to look out for is a place where the storm can't do us much harm."

"Yah. Dot vos so, und I know of yust der place. Der pe von dyin' veller, vot wants to see you, Miss Roarin' Ruth. He pe shot mit der heart through, und wants to make der 'quaindunce off somepody, right away off quick. I dry to speag mit him his mind oud, but he no takes no railroad stock in me. I dells him apoud you, und he vant you to come!"

"A dying man? Where?"

Roaring Ruth looked interested.

"Oh! he pe lay up der mountain, a vays, under a ledge of rock. I see him und vas goin' to shoot him, vor von Injines, ven he speag oop, und dells me to 'cheese it,' den I know heim white."

"And you say he is shot?"

"Yah! plum t'rough der heart."

"And he wanted to see me?"

"Yah! I spes vot he vant to make his lasd vill und desdatorments, or somedings like dot."

"Probably some mountain rough, whose turn has come to pass in his checks!" Roaring Ruth concluded. "However, lead the way, and I'll go up and take a look at him. Can the *burro* climb up to the place?"

"Yah! Jerry miaher he go oop youst like a rabbit. Come!" and without further parley Dutch Dave led off.

A strangely associated pair, those two young people. They always traveled, hunted and prospected together. They were known in some of the mountain camps, but it was only as the two rovers, Roaring Ruth and Dutch Dave.

They were also known to be fearless, and, indeed, recklessly bold, in penetrating the various labyrinths of the hills, where even old prospectors hesitated to venture.

Already since their advent in the wilds of Arizona, they had been instrumental in the opening up of several profitable mining-camps, and it was pretty generally believed that they were well "beeled," as regards money.

Although a young woman, and alone, save for what protection Dutch Dave might be able to afford her, there were few men who cared to risk the inevitable "trouble" resulting from offering insult to Roaring Ruth.

It was a well-known fact that the girl was perfectly able and quick to take her own part, and she would as lief shoot a man that insulted her as to look at him.

On the threatening night we encounter them, they were *en route* from the mining-camp of Casa Bianca to a new "breeze" or "excitement," which labored under the suggestive title of Devil's Diggings, in Southern Arizona.

Dutch Dave, although by no means an "old timer," in the peculiar life which he and his fair companion led, was a shrewder individual than he was generally given credit for being. He was especially a good trailer and hunter; and he led the way from the gorge up the steep and craggy mountain side with the rapidity and dexterity of an Alpine guide.

He, too, kept an anxious eye upon the overcast heavens, for he was well aware that it was no ordinary storm that was impending, and he was fearful they might not be able to reach the point he had in view, ere the outburst came.

But, by good fortune, they did, and not a moment too soon, for the rain came down in torrents, and the darkness of night enshrouded the wild and rugged landscape.

They had come to a halt upon a little bench, or out-cropping ledge, while above and projecting far out over them, was another greater ledge, which snugly sheltered them from the storm.

Here, upon a blanket, lay the man of whom Dutch Dave had spoken.

Roaring Ruth directed Dave to kindle a fire, out of some leaves and debris, and then she went and knelt beside the wounded man.

She saw at once that he was neither old nor rough, as she had predicted.

He had a wiry, graceful figure, denoting great strength and endurance, and was clad in a suit of dark clothing, with top boots, sombrero, and belt for weapons.

In face, though now very pale, he was rather handsome, with dark magnetic eyes, a firm but pleasant mouth, a graceful mustache and imperial, and a wealth of dark hair, that clustered in waves from his forehead, back, and rippled down upon his shoulders.

His eyes were open, and his face bore an expression of intense suffering, when Ruth knelt beside him.

She eyed him, rather curiously, as if she were endeavoring to recall to mind whether she had ever seen him before or not.

"Who are you?" he asked, seeming to infer that she was waiting for him to speak. "Do you belong to the Dutchman?"

"Hardly. The Dutchman belongs to me. I am Roaring Ruth, the Girl Prospector. Who are you? I fancy I have seen your face, somewhere."

A peculiar smile lit up his features.

"Very likely," he replied, dryly. "The authorities of at least two territories have had cuts made of my phiz, so well did they like it, and you may have seen it tacked up on some tree, stump or shanty-side, where men have mined for gold. As a general thing, from one to five hundred dollars would be offered for the owner of the face."

Roaring Ruth eyed him with a puzzled look.

"I don't know that I should know you by that description!" she said.

"Maybe not. I am, now, a 'played' prospector, and have had my last chance, I guess. It don't matter much, though. Friends have gradually dropped off, until I can't name a one who would shed a tear on hearing of my demise."

"Have you ever heard of a wild, reckless mountain man, young lady, who defied the law at times, again only to espouse it; who faced death with as much reckless disregard as he would face a single foe, and never knew a sense of peaceful security, but to be roused from it into a state of mortal warfare? In clearer meaning, did you ever hear of Deadwood Dick?"

Ruth started.

"I have!" she replied. "I have heard many reports of him, both adverse and otherwise. Are you Deadwood Dick?"

"I am—or, what's left of him. I've got a bullet-hole in me that would have killed nine out of every ten men stone-dead soon after the shot was fired. How d'ye like the looks of that?"

He opened one hand and exposed a bullet of unusual size. Only a rifle of extraordinary bore could have sent it on its deadly errand—and, clearly, it had already been used.

"Heavens!" Roaring Ruth ejaculated, in astonishment. "It ought to kill an elephant, much less a human being!"

"Yet it failed to fetch me!" Deadwood Dick said. "It will, though—I haven't a doubt about that. I am aware that I am filling up internally, and it won't take long to wind up my career here below."

He spoke with a calmness that Ruth could not understand.

It was because she did not know this strangest of peculiar natures.

Her interest in him, however, was already greatly aroused.

"Won't you let me examine your wound?" she said. "I have a little knowledge of surgery, and may be able to save your life."

"Ah, no; I am satisfied that is impossible, young lady. I dug the bullet out myself, and know the wound will prove fatal. It has not bled externally."

"Yet, you may be helped. If you—"

"I don't care to have the wound touched. Tampering with it could do me no good. Have you any liquor?"

"Yes. Dave, bring me the flask."

The Dutchman obeyed, and Dick swallowed a little of the liquor.

"That will keep me up until I want to go," he said, passing his hand over his forehead.

"Young lady, I shall not last long, and while I do, I must speak. As I told you a few minutes ago, I have not a friend in the world who would shed a tear over my dead body. I am alone, and unhappiness has followed me to the last."

"You should cheer up, sir. There may be a bright and happy future in store for you?"

"If there is, it will not be here below," he re-

plied, sadly. "How the hereafter will pan-out, I have, of course, no positive means of knowing. Before I go, I have some arrangements to make. Where are you bound for, young lady?"

"We were en route for Devil's Diggings, sir, when Dave informed me of your presence here, and your sad condition."

"It is well. Devil's Diggings is a future success. I have prospected every rod of the range, hereabouts, and know where gold is, and gold is not. I have, in the past two months, taken out thirty thousand dollars in dust and nuggets, and converted it into coined gold. That gold is cached near the scene of my operations, which have been conducted nearly within rifle-range of Devil's Diggings."

"Indeed!"

"It is true. I had a companion, whom I trusted, and we worked together. We did it in secrecy. No one suspected us of being within a hundred miles of where we really were. We took out sixty thousand dollars, and then, by frequent trips to Tucson, converted it into coin, and brought it back. On our last return trip, we talked matters over. The immense vein of gold was yet worth working. But it was dangerous for us to cache our coin there, for fear of our being robbed. My partner said if he could take out as much more as he had done, he would be content to retire. He proposed we gamble, until one won and one lost all, including the mine. We did so. I won all. My pard then requested the privilege of remaining in my employ. I granted it, although I suspected he had designs of robbing me. Watching my chance, last night, I removed the ducats to another safer cache, where they are now secreted. Today, I started out for game, and was cut down by this bullet!"

He paused, and gasped.

"Quick! your pard's name?" Roaring Ruth cried.

"His name is Harry Leede. I don't know whether he shot me or not. Hunt down my assassin, and my ducats are yours! They are buried near my claim. Here is a sketch map or plan to guide you."

Something fluttered past Ruth's eyes.

Dick's hand had dropped; a fierce gust of wind had torn the tell-tale paper from his nerveless grasp.

It was swept away, far out upon the wild night, and lost, beyond hope of ever being found.

Ruth quickly applied her ear to the region of the "played" prospector's heart.

It had ceased to beat!

CHAPTER II.

KID KARL.

DEVIL'S DIGGINGS wasn't much of a camp, its first beholder would be apt to say, for, in truth, there were but two buildings in the "city."

The diggings in themselves were located in the gulch bottom, and were without exception placer claims, operated upon by three-score of miners, who barely eked out enough dust to keep them in "fodder," whisky, and now and then a dollar, to venture at the card-table.

Devil's Diggings had been started by an old, cranky-tempered and miserly chap, named Jonas Argyle.

He had, with his nephew, Nick Norvell, discovered gold in the bottom, and had immediately legally possessed himself of all the neighboring territory that careful prospecting proclaimed would yield any value in the way of minerals.

His next move was to erect the only two structures that composed the camp. One was a small shanty, designed for, and stocked up as a supply store. The other building was a huge affair, some two hundred by two hundred and fifty feet, built of logs and slabs, and divided into one large and many small apartments.

This building had a truly imposing appearance, and was designed for the accommodation of whosoever stopped off in Devil's Diggings—that is, if they had the wealth to "come down" for their accommodations; if they did not, they were politely invited to move on to the next town.

When he had everything in readiness, old Argyle had "boomed" his town, and by a moderate expenditure of money, secured a stage-route through it, running from a couple of more important camps.

Of course there was a moderate rush to the new diggings, and a number of claims were sold—more than enough to secure the success of the old miner's scheme.

In leasing the claims, each miner was bound by papers not to erect any sort of habitation thereon, and it was a part of the agreement that said miners, or their employes, should board and lodge at the Hotel Argyle, paying its regular rates, and should purchase all their various necessities and *et ceteras*, at the Argyle supply store.

Old Argyle, in leasing the claims, made a reserve of ten per cent of all minerals taken from them; and thus, in all respects, he had an emphatic monopoly that was bound to line his purse more or less liberally, according as the town was successful.

Some twenty claims had been taken up, and were worked by about two-score of miners, who composed the major part of the population.

Very likely more claims would have been located, but it was not every miner the stage dropped off at Devil's Diggings who cared to invest, and agree to Argyle's exacting stipulations; hence the camp had remained since its start a two-shanty "city," and, likely, no similar "city" existed in all the Far West.

Its population all had to endure with such accommodations as the Argyle afforded; miners though, in some instances, boarding themselves in their rooms in preference to paying the cost of eating at the regular hotel table.

The main room, or largest one, which was located on the ground floor, was given up to several uses. It was hotel office, bar-room, gambling parlor, court-room (where local justice was dispensed by Judge Tamarack Splinter), dining-room, and general place of resort for the entire population.

"Judge" Tamarack Splinter was a lawyer, and consequently was considered, and considered himself, an important fixture of the diggings.

Old Argyle and young Norvell, although they owned and managed the monopoly through which the camp existed, were not looked up to with much respect, and were really considered of less actual importance than the judge.

Of course, the camp had its inevitable ruffian—its "bloody terror." In this instance, the bad individual was a gent of leisure—a man about town, who lived not by the sweat of his brow, but practically by the dexterity of his fingers, and the abnormal size of his impudence.

Professionally, Jake McBride was a gambler. He was a brawny, muscular "tough," of the most pronounced Western order, with a fierce, ugly visage, dark and swarthy, that in itself was a phototype of his brutal nature. His jetty hair, mustache and goatee, too, gave tone to his evil aspect, and he ever dressed with a slovenly disregard to neatness, drank like a fish, and wore a brace of six-shooters in either bootleg, in addition to his belt weapons.

He was feared by all, having already killed three men since anchoring down at the diggings, and to dispute his veracity, or argue about a point in a game of cards, was considered as fatal as would be a convicted murderer's chances in the State of New Jersey.

On the evening witnessing the events chronicled in our first chapter, the citizens of Devil's Diggings were congregated in the Argyle, and dissatisfaction was manifested among them.

The fall rains were coming on, and that was probably the main cause of trouble, for this wet spell, in any mining locality, is a thing that miners universally dread; but in Devil's Diggings there was somewhat more anxiety.

The camp was less than six months old, and as a habitable place, had not yet passed through the periodical rainy season, peculiar to that particular region. The formation of the surrounding country was such as to give rise to grave fears that the drainage of the mountains would resolve into a heavy freshet, that must sweep through the gulch, of course with disastrous result, washing away much of the valuable pay-dirt, and wrecking the sluice-ways and other mining apparatus that had already been planted.

Then, too, if no real freshet should occur; the rainy spell promised to be an unusually severe and protracted one, as the summer had been torrid and very arid;—and therefore, but little work could be done, ere winter set in; so that the prospects ahead were rather gloomy.

As usual in a mining town, where the public pulse is ever fluctuating, the initial signs of general discouragement can best be discerned by the manner in which the miners take to heavier drinking than usual; and the miners of Devil's Diggings were no exception to the rule.

"Red-nose," "old bezam," "carbolic acid,"

"oil o' vitriol," "straight bug," and so forth—such, and others, were the titles used by the miners, clustering at the Argyle bar in search of better cheer, and as each beverage came from one bottle characteristically labeled "Pizen," it is safe to presume that each man got what he wanted.

Jake McBride sat at a table, as usual, in a bad humor, noting the discouraged feeling that was only too plainly expressed upon the faces of the miners. He knew that when the miners felt the loss of a dollar, except it were for whisky, they were chary about wasting or risking any cash at the gaming table; consequently, his own vocation promised to be profitless.

When the miners were "flush," he was not disposed to be sociable; but he saw, now, that he must needs do something to keep on good terms with them, or they might forget the man who delighted to rake in their hard earnings.

After they had imbibed several rounds, he arose and swaggered up to the bar.

"Waal, boyees," he said, "it looks like ye war in fer a leetle enjoyment, an' I s'pose ye hev'n't no 'jections ter my jinin' in the quadrille. So let's all be merry. Nominate yer 'wash,' one an' all. Mine's 'rough on rats'!"

Now the gambler was about the last man in the camp addicted to such a spasm of liberality, and the crowd stared.

"Spit 'er out, I say!" McBride ordered. "Tain't often ye hev the honor o' grinnin' at yours truly. Produce the cistern, Satan, an' remember, it's the best, at the expense of Jake McBride."

Satan was the nickname for the dispenser of liquor at the Argyle bar, and he was a bar-keeper who could set out the glasses and liquor with wonderful rapidity and equal urbanity.

The glasses were filled, and the health of McBride was drank with great gusto.

The emptied glasses had just been set down upon the bar when the door opened and a stranger walked into the room.

He was cloaked in a heavy water-proof, which reached to the tops of his knee-boots, and wore a slouched sombrero.

His figure was of usual proportions, and his face darkly handsome, with its black eyes and curling mustache, and hair of the same hue.

He carried a jeweled riding whip in his hand—both hands were gloved with brown kid—and had the bearing of a frontiersman, whether sportive or otherwise, might he be.

His eye was as keen as an eagle's.

He took a swift glance about the apartment, and at its *habitués*; then spoke, in a clear voice:

"Evening, gents! Does the man who leases claims hang out here?" he asked.

"He do, you bet!" McBride declared, getting a second ahead of Judge Tamarack Splinter, as spokesman—and that was a wonder, too, as the judge counted himself a talker, from Talkerville. "Old Argyle aire the man, and that aire he, over thar, in the office, wi' the green goggles an' the turn up nose, w'at looks as if he war tryin' to smell the brimstone o' futurity. But, I say, pardner, aire ye goin' to buy a claim?"

"Not one, but half-a-dozen, if I can get 'em at my terms," the dashing stranger answered.

"Bully for you, sir! I always thought some enterprising chap like you, would come along an' give the town a start. Come up—we've just been smilin'—an' have a drink."

"Thanks. I've caught enough moisture, outside, for immediate requirements," and smiling, the stranger walked away, toward the office, wherein old Argyle, and his nephew, took turns in presiding.

Jake McBride glared after the stranger, his face flaming with anger.

"He refused ter drink wi' me, didn't he?" he demanded, turning to the gang, for whom he had just "set 'em up."

"On course he did, an' yer entitled ter an apology," a miner decided.

"Not accordin' ter law!" declared the judge. "Blackstone sez thet refusin' ter drink ain't no offense comin' under the statutes ov any legal jurisdiction!"

"You keep yer lip out, or I'll make a Bilson out of you!" McBride roared, so savagely that the legal light of Devil's Diggings turned pale.

"Oh, yes! oh, yes! Ex-keuse me!" the judge faltered, for he really had a horror of bad men and most emphatically of the terror of the diggings. "I really meant no offense, sir. Of course the man is required to apologize to you—of course he is!"

If the stranger thought so, his actions did not go to show it. He walked up to the counter, behind which was Jonas Argyle's office, and nodded to the stub-nosed, withered speculator.

"You are old Argyle, I presume!" he said, composedly.

"I am Mr. Jonas Argyle!" was the stiff reply. Old Argyle died a quarter of a century ago!"

"Ah! excuse me! I took you for him. You look old enough to have been Cain's brother, Abel. I believe you dabble a little in mining-claims—that is to say, you have some to sell?"

"No, sir; I have some to lease for two years, but none to sell."

"Ah! Let me have the location of these claims and the particulars."

"I have a chart here. The lease, per claim, is two thousand a year, in advance. So, if you think the terms would be too high, I will not go to the trouble of showing you the chart."

"You lazy old boor. Trot out your chart. Of course I intend to invest!"

With an effort, old Argyle produced the chart, and gave the required explanations. The most of the claims were on the north of the hotel. There were half a dozen below, but these were comparatively worthless, he said, and he could not say for sure that there was any pay-dirt upon them.

"How much will you take for them?" the stranger asked, carelessly.

"Oh! a thousand apiece!"

"Say five thousand for the six, and I'll take 'em!"

"It's a bargain! Give me the cash, I'll give you a receipt, and the lease will be ready for you to-morrow."

Nodding, the stranger took a large roll of bills from his pocket, and counted out the exact amount, receiving, in return, a receipt in full for the same.

The name given by the stranger was Kid Kari; he then walked back toward the bar.

The crowd had drawn to one side, and were conversing in undertones over the prospects of a "jamboree"—for Jake McBride still stood leaning against the bar, the ugly expression upon his ugly face, clearly proving that it was not his intention to let the fancied insult pass by unnoticed.

Without paying the least attention to him, Kid Karl sauntered up to the bar, and laying down a quarter—the price of a single drink—said, pleasantly:

"A little good whisky, please."

His face depicting considerable surprise, Satan set forth the bottle and a single glass. The stranger poured out a moderate drink, and raised it toward his lips.

Instantly there was a pistol report, and the glass was shattered by a bullet. The same bullet, also, took off the tip of Kid Karl's right forefinger.

He looked around, not deigning to notice the injured member, and saw McBride with the smoking revolver still in his grasp, and a malicious grin upon his face.

"It was me!" the gambler declared, with a leer. "Got anything ter say erbout it?"

"Most assuredly I have!" Kid Karl responded, promptly. "I want to know what you mean by your action just now!"

"Mean?" echoed McBride—"mean? Why, stranger, ye orter feel grateful I let ye off alive!"

"Had I? And what for?"

It was innocently asked.

McBride laughed outright, while the crowd smiled, broadly.

"What for?" the gambler ejaculated. "Why, stranger, ye waltzed inter this shebang, didn't ye?"

"No, sir. I walked in!"

"Oh! ye needn't chirp up so smart-like. Ye waltzed in. Ye found us galoots jest arter hevin' a drink, didn't ye?"

"The appearances went to indicate some such fact."

"I invited ye up ter smile, an' ye sed 'nay'?"

"Very well. Go on!"

"Waal, accordin' ter the rules of ettercut, thet war a p'izen insult!"

"Indeed!"

"Sart'in! Ye warn't dry—oh! no! Yet wifin fifteen minnits ye cum back an' bought yer own sap wifout as much as winkin' at us, or axin' us hed we a b'iler. Now, as a usual thing, we plant a man'thout ceremony for a thing like that, but I reckoned ye war sorter green, an' so I simply reminded ye o' yer fergitfulness by distributin' yer slop so ther boyees c'u'd ketch ther scent of it. Them's ther lightest penalties ever inflicted, in this hyer burg; so we'll all drink wi' ye, an' call it squar'. Come up, boyees! We all gulp at ther tenderfut's expense. Mine's nitro-glycerin!"

"Excuse me, gents. You treat yourselves at

my expense when I ask you!" Kid Karl cried, fiercely. "As for you, sir ruffian, if you want to fight, put those tools away, and come and let me break your big jaw!"

McBride uttered a howl of joy.

An instant later he leaped toward the stranger, and a wicked battle of bared knuckles began.

McBride was largely the stranger's superior in size and muscular development, and though he was himself badly punished, he finally succeeded in knocking his antagonist senseless to the floor.

"Keep your place!" a cool voice immediately cried. "I will take up the man's quarrel, and see if you can knock me out so easy!"

And through the open doorway Roaring Ruth stepped into the room.

CHAPTER III.

RUTH ON HER MUSCLE—A WONDERFUL BURRO. THE advent of Roaring Ruth, as may be supposed, created a wide-spread sensation, coming as she did with so warlike an announcement.

Right behind her came Dutch Dave, carrying their weapons, while the sedate-looking burro brought up the rear.

Roaring Ruth, to make the matter seem more strange, looked to be dead in earnest.

Jake McBride turned and glared at her a moment in incredulous wonderment, as if he was not really satisfied that he heard aright.

Then he burst into an uproarious guffaw, while rather a suggestive smile appeared upon the faces of the rough-visaged audience.

"Did I heer ye say anything?" the gambler demanded, turning toward her and making an over-obsequious courtesy. "Did I heer ye whisper in dulcet tones, high key of G., thet ye would like ter glue yer ruby lips to mine in osculatory greeting?"

"I told you to keep the floor, and I would take up the gentleman's quarrel," Ruth declared coolly. "I always did hate to see a great calf, like you, a-tryin' ter crowd a sickly 'un out o' the stanchion. If you want to stand up afore me, I'll agree to knock you out so quick thet ye won't know yer nose from the hummix of a Sahara camel."

"Ye'll mash my smeller, hey?"

"You bet!"

"An' spread my countenance out so flat it'll look like a forty-acre farm?"

"Shouldn't a bit wonder of I would!"

"Ye'll put mourning circlets around my eyes an' send my molars down my throat ter chew my liver up inter mince-meat?"

"Come waltz me and see!" was the cool response, which amazed the bystanders beyond expression.

Compared with the gambler, Roaring Ruth was of but pigmy size, for although possessed of a well-molded figure, she was short of stature, and illy-matched to stand before such a man as the ruffian card-manipulator.

"Ye heer her!" that worthy cried, turning to the crowd. "Ye heer what ther leetle saphead sez. She allows she kin put a nose on me!"

"Thet aire against the law. I'll arrest ye both fer prize-fightin'!" sung out Judge Tamarrack Splinter.

"Wait till I get my hooks onter ye—I'll make ye need a grave-stone, instead o' Blackstone!" warned McBride.

"My dear young heifer," he added, playfully throwing a kiss at Ruth, "I shel hev to decline yer offer ter commit suicide, on ther grounds thet et would be inhuman fer me ter punch a purty piece o' caliker like you. Who be ye?"

"I'm Roarin' Ruth, an' I kin backup my cognomen every day in a week. Why, ye don't opine I'm afeard of ye, do ye? You're nothin' but a half-grown pimple. Ef ye don't believe it, come an' let me put a patent blister on yer jaw! I'm the boss gal from Black-an'-Tan, and you bet I'm on my muscle. Dare ye come?"

"Durst I come?" repeated McBride—"durst I? Waal, I should belch up a bulldorg!—an' remember, dear little sissy, thet it becomes our duty o' performin' the last sad rites o' plantin' ye, an' ye mustn't squeal fer a preacher, 'cause they don't grow in the soil of Devil's Diggings."

"Correct. I'm not in need o' one yet."

"Ye will be!"

"Prove it!"

With an oath McBride strode forward, his fists doubled up, like sledge-hammers.

It was evidently not his intention to show the girl any mercy, and he undoubtedly counted on an easy victory.

But he reckoned without his host.

Roaring Ruth's arms were about as long as those of her opponent, and the instant they got

within striking distance McBride received a thwack under the left eye, that, for the time, caused him to see whole firmaments of planets, to say nothing of little stars.

He retained his equilibrium, however, and struck back, fiercely and wildly, delivering not so much as one scientific blow.

This was perhaps owing to the fact that the first blow had in a measure dazed him, rendering him really unfit for active service. His bulldog nature, however, urged him on, even though he received severe punishment.

And Roaring Ruth?

She stood firmly braced, in pugilistic attitude, and, by sharp and telling execution proved, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that she knew just what she was about.

She had surely practiced the art of self-defense before, thereby making it a "womanly" art as well as a "manly" one.

Every blow of the gambler she parried with perfect ease, and sent back a telling shot in return that would elicit a howl of pain and rage.

Small and shapely though were her doubled fists, they were hard, as here and there a bleeding bruise upon the ruffian's face gave token.

The crowd grew enthusiastic, but few of them dared applaud at McBride's misfortune, for fear of after results.

At last, with a string of vindictive oaths, the ruffian made a final spurt, and endeavored to grapple with his wonderful adversary.

He was aware that he was badly used up, and he could not stand up under the punishment very long, unless he soon gained an advantage and held on to it.

His attempt to grapple, however, was anticipated by Roaring Ruth, and she frustrated it by planting a blow under his left ear which fairly lifted him off his feet and landed him against the wall in a heap.

He was not knocked senseless, but lay where he had fallen, making no attempt to rise.

He glared at Roaring Ruth, from out his swollen eyes, in a way that betrayed the wolfishness of his brutal nature.

"Quit!" he growled, as she took a step toward him. "I've had enough. I'll get square with you some other time."

"Oh! suit yourself about that—only don't try to pick on any one smaller than yourself when I'm about. I don't allow thet sort o' thing, ye know!" Ruth declared.

She then walked off toward the hotel office, and Dutch Dave and the burro followed her.

"What are you bringing that brute into the hotel for?" old Argyle demanded savagely, as Roaring Ruth approached the counter. "Put it out-o'-doors, I say, quicker than scat!"

"How quick is that?" Ruth asked, glancing at her watch. "There ain't no scat marked out on my chronometer!"

"Take that donkey from my hotel!" the miser roared, furiously. "D'ye hear?"

"No. I'm deaf as a bat, and besides, this ain't no donk. He's burro, straight out-an-out, an' his name is Jerry. Wherever I camps, there camps Jerry."

"Then, you can't stop here!" Argyle declared. "So git up an' git out o' here, at once!"

"Not if the court knows herself, I don't, an' ther court, on this occasion, do know jest what she aire about. 'Skuse me—my name is Roaring Ruth, I wear a number four boot or moc, and whar I sets down my fut I always stay, pervidin' I wanten. Therefore, you'll oblige, by callin' up yer nigger waiter, and showin' us to yer best parlor—fer ther three of us, understand. Shet up—don't you say no, or I'll give you a plumbago pill, to quiet your nerves! You order a room, or you won't have time, even, to appoint an executor to your will."

And drawing a pair of revolvers, the eccentric girl brought them to a level with the miser's heart, and cocked them, in a decidedly business-like manner.

Now it chanced that old Argyle had heard of Roaring Ruth, before, and this hearsay had announced her as a dangerous person to trifle with, as she would "as lief shoot as eat."

The unpleasant prospect of getting a bullet through his heart, was something that the miser didn't consider it safe to deliberate on, and so he touched a call-bell, and ordered a Chinese servant, that appeared, to show the singular trio to a room.

They disappeared, but only for a short time. Then, they emerged from the apartment that had been assigned them; the burro had been unburdened of his load, and appeared considerably more lively.

Roaring Ruth sauntered up to the bar, fol-

lowed by Dave and Jerry, and looked invitingly around at the crowd.

"Well, galoots, d'ye ever h'ist?" she interrogated. "Roarin' Ruth, the ragin' simoon from Shootville, aire on deck, and ruther opines it's time fer ter irrigate, ef ther shebang affords anything good. Will ye tumble?"

"Tumble?" echoed Judge Tamarack Splinter, who was a six-and-a-half footer, lean and lank as a bean-pole, and possessed of sharp, shrewd Yankee features.—"tumble, did ye say? Why we kin do jest ther purtiest acrobatic act toward ther bar, thet ye ever see'd. Boys, ye heer? She sez juice; hence, we acrobat! Anything ter please ther fair sex!"

And at a motion from the disciple of Blackstone, the men formed in line, abreast, and attempted to turn a hand-spring, after the manner of gymnasts.

The result was most amusing. But two men of those who had attempted the feat accomplished it.

The others came down upon the floor with a solid force that made the great building tremble, and the positions in which they fell were numerous.

Judge Splinter completely "barked" the skin off from his nose, and ran a big sliver in his cheek—wonderful thing to relate, as he afterward acknowledged, considering the hardness of it; one man broke his neck, and another his wrist, and all were more or less bruised.

Yet all came promptly to time for their beverage, except the man who had broken his neck, and even he made a last effort to join the "boys," but his lamp went out too quick.

"You'll excuse us!" Judge Splinter said, apologetically, as he hoisted his beverage. "The dampness of the floor made it slippery."

"Oh! cert'," Ruth acquiesced. "Ah! here is the vanquished stranger just getting up. Join us, pard!"

"Thank you, I believe I will," Kid Karl said. "Maybe a bit of liquid lightning will help me to collect my scattered senses."

"Good. Nominate your p'izen, gents. I take kerosene. Dutchy here drinks whisky-sours, an' Jeremiah takes it straight from the nozzle. A special bottle fer Jerry, bark'er!"

The drink was produced and poured out, and "h'isted."

At a word from Roaring Ruth, Jerry, the burro, advanced to the bar and, rearing upon his hind legs, placed his fore-feet upon the counter, and opening his mouth, actually grinned in the face of Satan, the beverage-mixer.

"Jerry, what's yours?" Roaring Ruth demanded, patting him. "Speak up lively, as the gents aire waitin' on ye!"

Jerry wiggled his huge ears intelligently and uttered an ear-splitting bray.

"That means whisky in French," observed Ruth. "Barkeeper, give me an extra bottle. Drink, gents."

They did drink.

All but Jake McBride.

That worthy had retired to his own room, in company with the local surgeon, to have his battered face dressed.

Dashing off the neck of the bottle, Roaring Ruth poured a part of the liquor into the open mouth of the burro, who swallowed it all with the gusto of a habitual bummer, and as if he wanted more.

So Ruth gave him the remainder, and it disappeared the same as the first.

"Come now, Jerry, haven't you had enough?" Ruth said, as the burro gazed at the row of bottles behind the bar. "Get down, now, and let's have a little fun!"

Jerry promptly obeyed, and "itched" his sides with his hind-boofs, which seemed to indicate that he began to feel and appreciate the warming effects of the liquor he had drank.

"Now, gents, perhaps ye ain't aware o' the fact thet Jerry aire a wonderful animal in more than one way. Not only aire he as fond o' his bitters as any o' you gents, but he kin do several different likely sarcus shines, w'ot shows how I fetched him up. Jeremiah, where is the clock?"

The mule pricked up its ears, and turned its head from side to side, inquiringly. Then it raised one fore-foot, and pointed in the direction where a large time-piece was fastened against the wall.

A murmur of surprise escaped from the lips of the spectators.

"Oh! thet ain't nothin'!" Roaring Ruth chuckled. "Thet aire burro knows a thing or two, ef it is hoss sense. Jerry, my dear, tell the gents what number the hour-hand is on by wigglin' your left ear; then the minnit-hand by wigglin' yer right!"

To the amazement of all, Jerry squinted at the clock, with one eye partly closed, and his left ear bobbed forward nine times; next his right ear performed a similar movement fifteen times.

"Correct!" Ruth said, turning to her audience, with a triumphant nod. "You perceive it is fifteen minutes of nine o'clock—which illustrates thet Jeremiah knows purty near what he is about. But, I say, Jerry, what do you generally do after you've performed a trick?"

The burro wheeled promptly around, reared, planted his forefeet upon the bar, and brayed loudly.

A yell of delighted applause escaped the crowd, at which Jerry brayed louder.

"Come, Jerry; you'll get boozy if you tickle your throat any more. Get down and put your ar's around my neck."

The burro wheeled around, walked over to the girl prospector upon its hind hoofs, and placed its fore legs upon her shoulders, affectionately.

Another cheer went up.

"Get down, Jerry," Ruth ordered, and make yourself at home. If any galoot tries to make luv to you paste him one on the jaw. Dutch Dave?"

"Yah! yah! I vas heer."

"Good. See thet Jeremiah don't get into any mischief."

"I looks oud for dot!" Dave assented, and sauntered away.

Jeremiah walked serenely about the great room, eying every one and everything with human intelligence.

"Excuse me, young lady, but what price do you place upon that wonderful animal?" Kid Karl asked, doffing his sombrero to Ruth.

"Price? Why, stranger, thet ain't enuff gold in these hills, to purchase thet 'ar burro. He, Dutch Dave an' I, aire one firm, an' thar ain't no dissolution o' partnership, unless one o' us passes in our chips. Luk at thet muel, will ye? I see'd what he war aimin' fer!"

Jerry had paused by a table, where old Jonas Argyle and another man had just commenced a game of cards, and was looking on with all the apparent interest of a human player.

"He opinez he'd like to take a hand," Ruth observed. "Hope the old chap won't rile Jerry, he may get his scalp snatched off!"

Jerry was the center of attraction for the evening, and the crowd gathered in the vicinity of the table.

"Take yer darned mule away!" roared old Argyle, addressing Ruth. "We don't keer about havin' j. ckasses mixed up in our games."

"Jerry ain't hurtin' ye," the girl replied, coolly. "He likes ter luk on, an' ef thar's any cheatin' he'll apprise ye of it, by squealin'!"

"I tell ye ter take the brute away. I don't want a mule's breath in my face, ner won't have it!"

"His breath aire as much sweeter'n yourn, than shooger is sweeter than vinegar. An' as fer gittin' Jerry away from thet table, it's out o' the question! I'll bet an even ten dollars, thet there ain't any five men in the room as kin git him away 'thout usin' a lasso, or weapons!"

No one appeared to be desirous of risking the chances of battle with the sagacious animal's heels.

"Tell ye what!" Roaring Ruth went on, lighting a cigarette, "thet animal knows a heap, he do. He's a claryvoyent, be ar'. Ye kin shuffle ther keerds, deal out a hand, face down on the table, then deal out one card o' each set, face up. He'll p'int out w'ich keerd o' the face down ones b'longs to the set up 'uns, an' indicate how many spots aire on it, by wigglin' his ears."

"Bosh! nonsense!" stormed old Argyle. "Even but few card sharps can call the turn of a card, unless they know the deck."

"I've a stray dollar ter bet, an' the 'bug' fer the shebang, thet my burro, Jeremiah Jefferson Joccraldi Jones, ken do jest thet very thing!" declared Roaring Ruth, coolly.

"Bosh! I'll bet a hundred dollars he can't! Why d'ye mean to tell me, if I lay six cards down on the table, faces down, and then in another place, lay a heart, club, spade and diamond, face up, the brute will point out which of the turned-down cards, suits with those turned up, and indicates the number of spots on it, without turning it over?"

"I do, you bet!"

"Why, curse me, but you're crazy, girl. I'll bet five hundred dollars it cannot be done!"

"So will I!" declared the man who had been playing with Argyle. "Unless we are in an age of miracles, such a thing is utterly preposterous!"

"All right and well, if you think so, but I shall just have to go ye, gents," Roaring Ruth declared, producing a roll of bills of large denomination.

"In the classic phraseology of Shakespeare, or any other man, please put up, or shut up!"

Argyle and his companion exchanged glances, and hesitated.

"Hurra, boys! Two gallus old sports bluffed by a burro!" yelled a miner.

That settled it.

Two thousand dollars were stacked upon the table, to be won or lost.

"Git your cards ready, gents, while I get a glass of water!" Roaring Ruth said, turning away.

Pricking up his ears, Jerry followed her, and an instant later, his fore feet were planted upon the bar, and he uttered another ear-splitting bray.

"No use," Ruth said. "Thet anymile is allus on deck, where beverage is concerned. Give him another bottle, bub!"

Satan sat forth another bottle of whisky, and Ruth gave the burro a small portion of the contents.

They then went back to the card-table.

In one place old Argyle had spread out the jack of spades, queen of clubs, king of hearts and queen of diamonds, faces up.

In another place lay six cards, face downward.

Roaring Ruth led Jerry up to the table, and patted him upon the head.

"Now, Jeremiah, the gentlemen want you to show 'em what you know about the pasteboards. Here is a little stick with which to operate. Look! are the cards all on the square?"

Jerry gazed at the face-down cards a moment, and then shook his head.

"He sez there's something crooked about the cards," Roaring Ruth said, and reaching quickly forward, she turned over the cards.

They were all blanks!

"A man who would try to cheat a dumb brute ought to be hung!" the girl cried, grimly. "Smart as you were, old scorpion, ye couldn't fool Jeremiah. Thet war about as contemptible a trick as I've frustrated in a long time, you miserable apology for a man. It won't save you a cent, though. Dish out your cards, wi' spots on, an' do the thing squar', or I'll shoot an ear off of you!"

Looking decidedly sheepish over the discovery of his attempt to cheat, old Argyle produced a fresh deck of cards, and shuffled them.

He then dealt out six cards, in a row, faces downward.

"Now, go ahead wi' your jackass-intelligence show!" he gritted.

Without a reply, Roaring Ruth placed one end of a pointed stick, about a foot long, between Jerry's teeth.

"Now, then, Jeremiah," she said, "to what suit of cards does the first turned-down card belong?"

Shifting his head, the remarkable animal allowed the point of the stick to drop upon the upturned Queen of Diamonds.

"He says the card is a diamond. Now, Jerry, how many spots are there upon it. Wiggle your left ear as many times as there are numbers, or spots!"

Eight times, did Jerry's huge left ear nod forward!

"Ah! the eight spot of diamonds, eh? Are you so positive, Jerry, that you can afford to assure these galoots it's a fact?"

Jerry nodded, whereat the rough audience gave way to thunderous applause.

"Old gent, to satisfy all thatt Jerry knows a thing or two, please hold up the card!" Roaring Ruth directed.

Old Argyle obeyed, sharply uttering an oath. It was, indeed, the eight of diamonds!

CHAPTER IV.

KID KARL'S SCHEME.

FOR a minute afterward, the building trembled, owing to the reverberating effect of the tumultuous applause.

"The wager is fairly won!" cried Mr. King-land, one of the losers, as he handed the stakes over to Ruth. "But, by the powers of St. Michael, it's something beyond my comprehension."

"It's infernal humbug. The accursed brute is leagued with the devil!" growled Jonas Argyle, furious over the loss of his money, which the girl-sport demurely tucked away, in her pocket.

"It war all square," Ruth declared, with a chuckle. "Jest ter show ye Jerry understand."

his biz, we go through wi' the rest o' the performance."

They did.

One card after the other did the *burro* "call," in his peculiar way, and never missed a one.

The excitement and enthusiasm was intense. Never had it been equaled, in Devil's Diggings.

As soon as practicable, Jerry was taken to the room, by Dutch Dan, and no more was seen of them, that night.

Roaring Ruth, however, lingered about the main hall, awhile longer, and was at once a popular and respected personage.

After a little ingenious maneuvering, Kid Karl, once more succeeded in drawing her into conversation.

"I have just learned that I am much indebted to you," he said, gallantly. "They tell me that you took up my quarrel with Jake McBride and punished him, and I am sure I owe you much gratitude for that."

"Oh! that's of no account. I saw him floor you and thought it would be a good opportunity to introduce myself and companions into the fashionable society of Devil's Diggings," she responded, dryly. "Stranger here, eh?"

"Yes. I just arrived to-night, and bought up half a dozen claims, which are considered worth practically nothing."

"Indeed! What's your object?"

"Oh, a notion. I mean to realize a fortune. You seem to be a pretty shrewd sort of Bohemian; how would you like to go in with me and share the profits?"

"I ain't investin' in poor claims just at present."

"But, listen. My venture is bound to prove a bonanza. Promise me that you will take a hand with me, if I prove it, and I'll let you into my theory."

Roaring Ruth looked Mr. Kid Karl over critically. Although young in years, she was old in experience, and the knowledge which experience, as a rule, brings to those possessed of any aptitude to profit thereby.

Reared almost from infancy among the rude and peculiar associations characteristic of the mining districts of the far West, she had grown to be a remarkable young woman in more respects than one; had learned to be a natural student of human character, without, possibly, being aware of the fact.

She was not greatly impressed with the appearance of the stranger, whose cause she had recently espoused; there was something about his eyes that reminded her of the snake.

"If you have any ideas you wish to throw away I'll listen," she said. "I am not aware that I ever promised to do anything that I don't know anything about."

"Well, in that case, I'm not inclined to give away my secret, not knowing whether it will be kept or not."

"If it is worthy of keeping I shall not betray your confidence," Ruth replied, calmly. "Remember, however, that I have no particular desire to pry into your affairs."

"Oh, probably not. Well, relying on your discretion, I'll tell you: You understand, I've purchased these claims at the lower side of the camp where previous prospecting has failed to discover pay dirt worth the time of taking out."

"So much the bigger fool are you!"

"You're complimentary. It, however, remains to be seen, how much good sense I've got. I'm going, in the beginning, to dig a deep, wide ditch, from one side of the gulch, to the other—ten feet wide, perhaps, and as deep as I can get it!"

"Oh! I see. You're preparing your own grave, eh? Why do you make it so large? D'ye expect to bloat a great deal, out of the riches you'll accumulate in Devil's Diggings?"

"Hardly. Your facetiousness would seem rather far-fetched, wouldn't it, if you were, eventually, to see me ride out of this camp with a couple of millions, in gold?"

"Oh! you bet! But, go ahead. What in their name o' common boss-sense d'ye expect to git by diggin' them trenches? I reckon their placers don't run over two or three feet."

"Maybe not—I don't care a continental for that. Listen. Outside, the inaugural of the autumnal wet spell is at work. A few days—perhaps, only a few hours—of steady rain, will flood this gulch. From many a mountain siding and crevice, and fissure, will this gulch receive the off-pourings, and out-pourings, impregnated with mineral substance, for the most part, flakes of pure gold. This wash, consequently, must be swept along, from point to point, settling here and there, wherever there is a depression. You, therefore, must see the idea of my ditch. Gold being heavy matter, a large share of the

wash will not pass over the ditch, but will drop into it. If I cannot, after the flood is over, take out a snug fortune, I'll count myself a fool."

"Your idea is not original!" Roaring Ruth, said, grimly. "I tried a little racket o' thet kind, myself, once upon a time, but it didn't work. I hadn't got the ditch done when the galoots in the camp got on their ear, an' give me short notice to vamose. As I had less experience then, than now, I skipped."

"You don't allow my plan will work, then?"

"It might—agin it might not. I opine you couldn't get the help to put the job through."

"Bah! I'll risk that. Will you join me?"

"Nary. I've a better lay-out!"

Just then there was a commotion in the forward part of the saloon.

CHAPTER V.

MASKED MOSE MAKES A CHARGE.

THE commotion was caused, by the entrance of a single individual, who was plainly a stranger—a well built man, rather powerfully developed, and dashing in appearance—one, at a glance, who might prove a formidable antagonist. He was fairly well-dressed, in citizen's garb, and wore a slouch sombrero upon his head, and a belt of weapons at his waist.

All this was not so singular, in itself; it was the full black mask, upon his face that gave him an air of mystery.

He had entered the Argyle, without hesitation, and advanced to the bar, before any one had had time to pay any particular attention to him.

The discovery of his presence, however, had served to create quite a flutter among the *habitués* of the Argyle; for a person who sported a piece of black cloth in front of his face, might reasonably be classed as being a fair-to-middling "bad" man.

"Whiskey!" the masked man ordered, grimly. "Ef the other galoots are addicted to the use of 'bad habit,' they're included in their expressive ceremony!"

"Free p'izen, hyer, boys!" announced Satan, in stentorian tones. "You mortals as war born thirsty, gather at the fountain!"

A number of the miners cheerfully responded to the invitation; indeed, they were never known to do otherwise—would have considered it the height of impoliteness, on their part, to refuse a drink.

Some of the knights of the pick, pan and shovel, however held back, and looked on;—they were a little chary about drinking with a pilgrim who was afraid to show his face.

"I opine I generally knows who I h'ists my buttermilk wi'!" one miner declared, taking no care to have his remark unheard.

"If you don't want to drink, Mr. Snooks, ye hev the privilege o' lettin' it alone!" the masked man said, bluntly. "I allers likes ev'ry hair-pin ter consult his own convenience. As fer my name, ye as aire purtickler to know, can call me Masked Mose. Ther reason I keep my mug under an eclipse, is becase it is too ugly ter be let loose. Tell you, for an actual truth, what happened once: thar war a sarcus procession, an' I happened ter meet the elephant. My mug were so humbly thet the elephant got skeert, run away thru the crowd, knocked over a six-story house, killed fourteen people, an' I war 'rested and had to pay a thousand dollars cost. Since then I've kept myself muzzled!"

And, with a chuckle at his explanation, the stranger pressed the mask close to his face and dashed off the beverage through the mouth aperture.

The miners also got "outside" of their "three-fingers" with admirable dispatch; then Masked Mose vaulted lightly to a standing position upon the bar.

"Now, galoots, ef you'll lend me yer listeners, as Socrates or Demosthenes would hev sed, I've a little suthin' to remark which I opine concerns ye all. On course ye don't know who I am or who I ain't; fer all ye know I may be a murderer, road-agent, boss-thief or cowboy, or the Sultan o' Turkey, or General Grant, Henery Ward Beecher, or even Jay Gould or Mrs. Langtry, the Jersey grasshopper. Yet I ain't none of this—nothin' but jest a mortal man, with a face that would scare an electric light out o' countenance. To be sure, I kin h'ist p'izen, kill a gnat with a rifle-shot at a hundred yards, and hev even licked ten galoots single-handed. They were all tied to a tree, however. I ain't a magician, ner a patent-medicine fakir, ner a broken-down song-and-dance man or red-fire actor, nor am I a book or lightning-rod agent. But I've just drapped onto the fattest discovery ye ever hearn tell!"

The miners pricked up their ears instanter.

Roaring Ruth also drew near, considerably interested, where, until the utterance of the last words, she had paid but little attention to the stranger.

What discovery had he made?

Her mind went back to the mountain ledge where she had left Deadwood Dick after he had breathed his last.

Had this Masked Mose fallen into possession of the secret of Dick's buried treasure and its whereabouts?

If so, there were but two sides to the matter: either he had found the map that had wafted off upon the wild winds of that tempestuous night, or—he was the Harry Leclède, who had been Deadwood Dick's partner, and who, in all probability, had been the unknown assassin.

"I see ye'r all *qui vive* wi' expectation!" Masked Mose pursued, waving his hand oratorically, "an' that's quite proper. Ef thar's anything I like to see, it's a lot o' swill-swallowers, like you-uns, git enthused on a wet night like this."

"As I war sayin', I hev made a wonderful discovery, an' hev'n by nature been gifted wi' that feline—ah! excuse me, I mean feminine—accomplishment of not being able to keep anything to myself, I have of course but one thing to do—let you inter ther most extraordinary secret. Tharfore, ye see, thar's nothin' werry hoggish about me!" and he struck a highly dramatic attitude.

"If you've got any data to give us, why don't you sling it out—accordin' ter law!" grunted Judge Tamarack Splinter.

"Thet's just what I'm gettin' at, my slab-sided shyster—that's just what I'm gettin' at. Never interrupt a man from developin' a important discovery. As I war sayin', et aire a big thing on ice—a reg'lar bonanza. So heer goes ter relate, an' I trust every tympanum in the room is free from all obstructive matter, so thet my elucidations will be perfectly clear an' circumskute."

"Now, then, gay and gentle galoots, ye hev all beard of sech a feller as Deadwood Dick, I suppose—a gay and festive individual, who won his reputation as a road-agent and dare-devil during the '75-'77 excitement in the Black Hills?"

There was an audible murmur of assent from the rough audience.

"Know him—waal, I should sneeze!" cried Jake McBride, who had just made his reappearance, his face patched up with court plaster, and a bandage over one eye. "The son-of-a-sea-cook robbed a stage coach I war in, once, an' 'case I called him names, he put a bullet through my shoulder, layin' me up for a month!"

"Waal, he won't tap no more stage, an' do no shutin', 'case he's kerflumixed—conscientiously collapsed—gone where the woodbine twineth! It perhaps aire unknown ter ye thet the same festive Dickey has been workin' an immense mine of gold almost under your own noses, without your dreamin' of it."

A cry of astonishment escaped the miners, and they crowded involuntarily nearer to the speaker.

"This mine, up to the time of Deadwood Dick's death, yielded sixty thousand dollars, all of which is buried, at this minute, somewhere in the vicinity of the mine—just where, but one person on the face of this earth, has any knowledge."

"And you're the man!" cried Ruth, pushing forward. "You are the man!"

"Ho! ho! I wish I were, me daisy, but I don't happen to be so lucky. If I were the man, d'ye s'pose I'd take the liberal amount of pains to come heer and give the thing away? Oht no."

"Maybe we don't know all yer plans. If you do not know where the treasure is, how do you happen to know anything about the matter?"

"That is my business, Miss Sass!"

"O' course it aire!" chimed in Jake McBride. "Ef thet gal don't shoot off less mouth around here, thar'll be a funeral, devilish quick!"

Roaring Ruth laughed.

"Oh! there will, eh?" she retorted. "Now, I'll jest bet you on that. From indications, you'll need a coffin ef ye get too fresh again. Ye orter be glad I let ye off alive!"

"As I war sayin'," proceeded Masked Mose, "there is one man who knows where this treasure is located. This is the man who shot Deadwood Dick, in order to get possession of the boodle. He was also the partner of Dick in the mine, but Dick won away his share of the profits at cards. This fellow's name is Harry Leclède, and he is in this town to-night. His ob-

ject in coming is to see if there was any suspicions afloat regardin' the mine. Ef so, he proposes to skip wi' the sixty thousan' fer parts unknown. I happen ter know all o' this, 'ca'se I've been shadderin' him. I even see'd him fire the shot that killed his partner."

"I believe this is all a lie!" Roaring Ruth declared. "As it happens, I attended Deadwood Dick when he died. From what he said, I am satisfied that, aside from myself and his murderer, whom he believed to be Leclède, no one had any knowledge of the existence of the mine or the buried treasure."

"Aha! then you know where it is, eh?" Masked Mose cried, excitedly.

"I do not!" Ruth replied, quietly; "but I mean to find out, for that money belongs to me!"

"Oh! does it?"

"It does, you bet! Them aire my ducats, and you bet on that! Deadwood Dick gave 'em to me, providing I hunt down his murderer. He attempted to give me the paper containing information where his treasure was located, but a gust of wind blew it away, and he died a moment later, and the secret still remains unrevealed, so far as I am concerned. But, you bet Deadwood Dick's ducats belong to me, ef they're ever found!"

"I'll be cursed ef they do!" Masked Mose roared. "I purpose to have a swipe at 'em myself. Galoots, aire ye wi' me? Thar stands Harry Leclède, and he aire ther man w'ot killed Deadwood Dick, and knows whar ther treasure is secreted!"

And the speaker's fore-finger was leveled at the gloved stranger, whose quarrel Roaring Ruth had taken up—*Kid Karl!*

CHAPTER VI.

ROYA.

UP among the mountain crags, where a cordon of pines, gaunt and spectral, formed a fringe around a level but barren plateau, was pitched an encampment.

By following the sinuous paths which led to it, at least a day would be consumed in making a trip from it to Devil's Diggings and back.

At a first glance, the beholder would have been impressed with the idea that it was an Indian retreat, but such was not the case. To be sure, Indian wigwams were the only pretensions toward habitations erected upon the plateau, but the occupants of them were powerful men, a number of whom wore beards, and all dressed in the picturesque costume of the mountaineer, but wearing red cowls or masks, which covered the upper portions of their faces.

A dozen or more of these men were lounging about the plateau, each near a saddled horse of high spirit and great beauty.

It was near sunset of the day that had ushered into Devil's Diggings so many events of a peculiar and interesting nature.

The men upon the plateau were apparently awaiting orders to take to the saddle. Each horse was provided with costly accouterments, and the weapons showed evidence of recent cleaning and polishing.

The tents upon the plateau were formed in a sort of semicircle, the center one being much larger than the others.

Toward this particular tepee the road-riders—for such was their calling—directed now and then an impatient glance, as if vexed at the delay.

"The capt'in aire late, an' ther's a fair chance o' our makin' no haul ter-night," one of the party declared.

"The capt'in ain't 'tendin' to his bizness as close as he might," another commented. "We hain't tuk in a cent in a week."

"All on account o' the girl!" added the third. "She's takin' the wits all out o' him. Ef we hed hoss sense we'd slit her weasand. What the deuce do the capt'in keep her heer fer? Ye all know she hates him wuss'n paris green, an' I allow he hain't got more'n two ounces o' genuine affection fer her."

"I reckon it's one o' them cases that ain't none o' our bizness, fellers," Bill Bentley, the lieutenant, remarked. "Our business aire to obey orders. The capt'in hes got a secret, no doubt, but thet ain't ter say we should try ter pry inter it, I'll swar!"

"Dunno 'bout that," the first speaker retorted. "Ther captain orten't hev any 'portant secrets from us. Jest see the way he arrived in camp, awhile ago! He looked as guilty like he hed bin stealin' sheep."

The subject of the speech, was seated, at the moment, in the larger tent, which was furnished only with skins and a couple of stools.

The captain occupied one of the latter, while upon a heap of skins, near his feet, reclined a beautiful woman.

Not only was she beautiful of form, but in face, as well. It was a rich, oriental sort of beauty—an olive-tinted complexion, features so perfect that they seemed carved from wax, rose-lipped mouth, dark, lustrous eyes, and a wealth of hair as black as a raven's wing.

Her attire was simply a flowing wrapper, beautifully embroidered, with a bunch of wild flowers at her throat, and beaded moccasins upon her feet.

A book lay upon the furs beside her, but her gaze was turned upon the face of Ramon Ravec—a face darker than her own, and swarthy, too, with piercing black eyes, which wore a snaky glitter.

It required no skeptic to pronounce him a villain. His very presence seemed to speak of a wicked, ruthless disposition.

He wore a dark mustache, that added even more to his brigandish appearance, and was attired much the same as his followers, who were awaiting him, outside.

There was an expression of malignant displeasure upon his face, as he glared down upon the beautiful young woman, upon the furs.

"You seem to have less and less sense, each day you live. Ere long you will be a confirmed lunatic!" he declared, savagely.

She smiled with defiant sweetness.

"How it does anger you to know that I am gradually outgrowing the fearful affliction which enthralled me, when you captured me!" she retorted. "Far from being insane, any longer, I am as sane as you are, and am in hopes that ere many days, all of the past will come back before my vision, and I will know who were my parents, and where they live. Then, Ramon Ravec, I'll fly from you, like a freed canary, and send back those who will avenge the wrongs you have done me, by keeping me imprisoned here!"

"Bah! You have not been wronged—not even imprisoned. You have had your liberty to come and go as you pleased—therefore, you have remained of your own free will!"

"If so, it was because, at times, my mind was unsteady—because I knew not where to seek my friends."

"You are ungrateful. Why should you desire to leave me? Haven't I been more than kind to you? I took you in, a wandering, starving lunatic, and you owe your life to me. If I have been stern with you, occasionally, it was because your malady made you violent, and you must needs be governed, and your passion subdued. Even now, when you pretend to be in a passive, rational state, the fire of insanity is consuming the reason of your weak and disordered brain."

"'Tis false! You would make me mad, if you could, again; but, blessed be God, you no longer exert that controlling power over me. I am just as clear-brained as you are, Ramon Ravec, and you cannot anger me. Whatever villainous intentions you have toward me I will thwart, with a power and cunning that will astonish even you."

"Will you? But, then, you well know it is not in my heart, to do you a wrong, Roya. I love you truly and devotedly, as I have often told you. When I tell you that I want you for my wife it is doing you no wrong!"

"It is! It is! You are an outlaw, and not a fit man to expect the affections of an honorable woman; and, too, surely you would not care to wed a madwoman!" and she uttered a mocking laugh.

"Nonsense! I'd marry you if you were as mad as a March hare!"

"Indeed? How chivalrous!"

"Nothing of the kind. It would make my life miserable, Roya, to lose you, and I have come once more to importune you to overlook my faults, if indeed I have any, and reward my devotion to you by becoming my wife."

He spoke with the passion and earnestness of a man whose words expressed his truest feelings.

Their effect, however, upon Roya, was not marked; she languidly picked up the book and turned over the leaves.

"I am sorry, of course," she said, "but I could never for a moment think of such a thing as marrying you. There is another whom I have seen on several occasions, although he has never seen me. Were I ever to link my fortunes with any man he would be my choice!"

Ravec's face flamed, instantly, with sullen jealousy.

"Who is he?" he demanded, fiercely. "Tell me his name, till I cut his heart out!"

"Oh, no. My crazy sense would teach me better than that. Were you to harm one hair of his head, Ramon Ravec, woe be unto you! You had better go, now, or your men will be getting impatient."

"You are doing wrong, Roya. You are angering me and making me jealous, when you know you ought not. Why do you do it, when you know that when I'm in a rage I have no control over myself?"

"Sane persons should always control themselves!" Roya replied, with a sarcastic little laugh. "Don't you think so? Then, too, should you get in a tempestuous passion, I have a faint idea I could control you!"

"You?"

He looked amazed.

With great chagrin and annoyance, he saw that surely a great change had been wrought in her within a few days.

"Yes, I!" she said—"I, whom you have all along counted on as literally a slave to your will—I, who know not even the name of my parents or friends, because some mysterious blow deprived me of my reason. But go, Ramon Ravec; I tire of your presence. It is not long that I shall accept your hospitable shelter, and while I do, there is no need that we should fight and quarrel like cats and dogs."

"You shall tell me who this man is, whom you say you admire!" he cried, savagely.

"On the contrary, I shall not!"

"I command you to, girl! Refuse, and you shall suffer for your obstinacy."

"Bah! what care I for your threats! Did I know the person's name, I would not tell you!"

"Very well. You'll repent of it before I am through with you, my pretty. I can put up with a deal of trifling from you; but remember, I lay no claims to being a saint. As I said, I fancy I know this ideal of yours, and I swear he shall die. Then, my charming Roya, whether you will, or not, you shall marry me! D'ye hear?—you shall marry me! I swear to it!"

"Don't swear, please. That's wicked. As for killing my *beau ideal*, I have little fear of that, as I have every confidence that my knight could kill a dozen men of your caliber!"

"We shall see—we shall see!" he gritted, rising. "Ramon Ravec can be an angel or a demon, and I see that you prefer he should don the tail and horns instead of the wings. So be it!"

He quitted the lodge, his face dark and savage in expression, while Roya's taunting laugh followed him.

It was plain that his power over her was not controlling.

CHAPTER VII.

IN CUSTODY.

THE singular charge preferred by Masked Mose against the stranger, who had announced himself at the Argyle as Kid Karl, caused a murmur of astonishment.

The extraordinary report the masked man had made of Deadwood Dick's mine and buried treasure, and its corroboration, to a certain extent, by the odd, romantic character, Roaring Ruth, had inspired the miners with a belief that they were to a man on the very eve of "striking it rich"—in which case, old Jonas Argyle and his Devil's Diggings could go to the dogs.

All eyes were turned upon Kid Karl inquiringly, as Masked Mose pointed him out.

Karl flushed a little, but it was not a guilty flush by any means—it was an expression of embarrassment at the charge so suddenly leveled at him.

Roaring Ruth, whose gaze rested upon his face searchingly, was impressed with a similar opinion.

"Yas! thar he is!" Masked Mose repeated, "an' I'll swar to it on a stack o' New Testaments as high as old Crested Butte. I saw him stute the feller, Deadwood Dick, an' I follered him hyer to Devil's Diggings!"

"This is false, as I can prove!" Kid Karl retorted promptly.

"Far from being the man you would make me out, or of being guilty of the crime charged against me. I can assure you that I came to this place, to-night, direct from Pineville Flats. To prove this all you have to do is to send a messenger there, and find out what time I, Kid-Glove Karl, left that place; then figure up the time required to reach this place, oy rapid riding, and compare it with the time of my arrival here, which was just an hour and a half ago. The result will be my complete vindication!"

"Thet aire won't work," declared Jake McBride, blusteringly. "Ef Masked Mose swars

he see'd ye shute yer pard, why on course it aire so, an' you're jest who he sez you is. No amount o' yer chin will do any good, so ye'd better close yer trap or I'll make ye see stars again."

"Pooh! I'm not afraid of you!" Kid Karl replied. "Perhaps you're not the whole camp in yourself?"

"Ain't I? Now, I'll give ye a pin thet I'm from half to three-quarters ov it, anyhow!" McBride growled, ferociously. "I'm ther law an' order society, hyer, an' I find et my duty to arrest ye!"

"Yas, we aire the law an' order, in factum factorum!" chimed in Judge Tamarack Splinter; "I'm ther law, an' McBride aire the order. We two adjudicate all the affairs o' this hyer town, do we, an' you kin bet a meat-pie on it, Mr. Harry Leclède!"

"I protest against this indignity!" Kid Karl cried, his eyes flashing dangerously. "I have offered to prove an *alibi*, and no mock law, nor its minions, shall hold me a prisoner. I warn you that any attempt to arrest me will be attended with bloodshed!"

"Woof! Don't he pan out great talk!" cried Masked Mose, with a sneer. "Ef you are yer own lawyer, wait till yer case is fetched on afore ye spout so flush. This ain't no place fer *alibis*, ner nothin' o' the sort. I see'd ye do the job, wi' my own eyes, an', what's more, kin fetch another galoot thet war with me an' see'd the same. So, I say, boyees, thet's strong enough evidence to arrest him on, hey?"

"Of course!" was the general cry. "He's got ter stan' trial!"

"And you bet he shall have a fair trial!" spoke up Roaring Ruth. "I tell ye, feller-citizens, I don't believe Kid Karl is the man we want. I'm as much interested in fetchin' the murderer of Deadwood Dick to terms, as any o' ye, but I hain't in favor of seeing the job shifted off on an innocent man's shoulders. If Kid Karl is innocent, he shall go free, and don't you forgit it!"

"You'd better keep yer lip out, or ye may git hurt!" Masked Mose growled, sullenly.

"D'ye think you can hurt me, you coyote?" Ruth flashed back. "If ye do, why, just tumble down off from that bar, quicker'n a fly kin wink. I had the pleasure of mauling one disgustin' blatter to-night!"—with a nod toward McBride—"and ef I can't do you up in less than two minutes, by the watch, thar's no Sullivan about me!"

And she spat on her hands, and struck a pugilistic attitude, while a roar of laughter and applause burst from the audience.

Masked Mose uttered an oath, and was on the point of leaping from the bar, when he suddenly seemed to change his mind.

"Oh! but you wait! I'll attend to your case, later!" he gritted. "Now, then, gents, as it aire agreed ther fair thing to arrest the assassin, there's no use o' delayin' the matter. If the galoot surrenders, correct. Ef he don't he must be gobbled onto, anyhow. I'm in favor o' his havin' a fair trial, ef it will be a source o' satisfaction to him, ef he is willin' ter abide by the verdict. Will you surrender, Kid Karl, *alias* Harry Leclède?"

"I'll not! and I'll shoot the first dog who dares to attempt to arrest me!" Kid Karl cried, fiercely. "I'm a peaceable man when I'm not crowded upon, but I can fight when necessity requires it, to defend me from insult! You have heard me! Take your change, accordingly!"

At this instant, to the surprise of all, a new character suddenly appeared upon the scene. It was no one else than the miser monopolist of Devil's Diggings, Jonas Argyle, a man who generally had little to say, further than in the interest of his individual plans for personal gain; hence, his unexpected advent caused an instant silence to prevail.

"See here, miners!" he cried; "I allow I've a word or two to say here, haven't I?"

"Go on. A man as owns ther town hes ther legal right ter raise his voice, without a technical objection, from the court!" eloquently announced Judge Tamarack Splinter.

"What I have to say, is this: a serious charge has been preferred against this stranger, who has the appearance of being a gentleman, by another stranger, who looks very much like a first water cut-throat. As the testimony of the one man is as good as the other, even if both are blacklegs, it is fair that a trial be had, and Kid Karl be given every advantage of the law, that his case may call for. I will see to it, myself, that no personal spite shall be brought to bear against him, and that no personal harm shall come to him until he is fairly convicted—

that is, of course, if he surrenders without resistance!"

Roaring Ruth, who was standing beside Kid Karl gave him a nudge.

"You'd better do it!" she said, in an undertone. "You are not friendless, and if you are proved innocent we'll see that you get clear. If you resist you know what odds is against you."

"I know!" was the grim reply. "But they sha'n't lock me up. If I surrender at all, it must be with the understanding that I be allowed my personal liberty!"

Roaring Ruth turned to old Argyle.

"I think the matter can be arranged all right!" she announced. "Mr. Karl is willing to stand his trial, providing he is allowed his personal liberty, about town. I am sure thet's fair enuff!"

"Not by a jugful!" Masked Mose declared, fiercely. "D'ye want ter give him a chance to skip off wi' thet sixty thousan'? Oh! no! Kid Karl either surrenders or he dies wi' his boots on!"

"You bet!" chimed in Jake McBride.

"Splinter, you give him lawful notice to surrender. If he refuses, he's got to put up wi' the consequences."

"One technical minnit!" cried the judge, dodging up to the bar, and seizing a bottle which had just been set out for a customer. "Business afore pleasure, *always!* A full-fledged representative o' the law, aire always entitled to a little nose-paint afore beginning his duties."

A long swig and a strong swig, did the judge take; then he faced around and confronted Kid Karl, with a patronizing bow.

"Sir," he said, grandiloquently, "as a representative of ther legal jurisdiction o' Devil's Diggings et becomes my duty ter notify ye o' yer arrest, on ther charge o' murder, and you are commanded to surrender, without resistance!"

"Which I decline to do!" Kid Karl replied, suddenly exhibiting two cocked revolvers. "The man who attempts to lay a hand on me, dies!"

"Fellers, wull ye let one man dare ye?" roared Jake McBride. "Altogether, now—at him!"

It was a battle-cry, and the gang of miners heeded it. Of one accord, they rushed forward, driving Kid Karl back to the wall—with what result?

Bang! bang! bang!

The spiteful report of his weapons rung out, and with every shot came a responsive yell of pain.

It was a terrible struggle, and before the men of Devil's Diggings had effected a capture, they found that the game stranger was no boy to handle.

At last, however, he was overpowered and securely bound hand and foot.

It was then that the disastrous results of his resistance became more noticeable.

Three dead miners lay upon the floor, and half a dozen more were more or less seriously injured.

The excitement was intense, and for a time it looked as if there would surely be a lynch picnic. Certainly there would have been one had Masked Mose and McBride had their way; but Old Argyle once more interfered, and, as a result, it was decided to lock Kid Karl up, and give him the trial which he would be entitled to.

He was accordingly locked up in a room opening off the main apartment, and two armed men stationed at the door to prevent his escape.

The dead and wounded were then removed, and the Argyle once more resumed something of its former appearance, except that it contained an excited crowd of humanity.

Loud were the dissents against giving Kid Karl a trial, but Jonas Argyle held firmly to his text, so to speak, and no one seemed to care to press a mutiny against his will.

It was generally a matter of surprise, however, to see the miser take so bold a stand in public affairs, where, hitherto, he had never made it a point to take any interest in any one but himself and his nephew, and right-hand man, Nick Norvell—the latter, a dark-faced, grim and reserved individual, who attended the miser's books, and spent much of the remainder of his time in roving about the great saloon and keeping an eye on those who frequented it.

It was matter of but little speculation that, when old Argyle passed in his checks, Nick Norvell would be his heir.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DULL DAY AT THE DIGGINGS.

THE next morning dawned, as wild and tempestuous, as had been the preceding night, and things looked decidedly blue at Devil's Diggings.

The rain poured down so hard as to preclude any possibility of the miners going to work; consequently they kept closely housed at the Argyle, with a few exceptions.

As Kid Karl's trial was not to come off, until the next day there was plenty of time to discuss his case, which was improved.

As early as daybreak, Mc Bride and Masked Mose were up and about, and soon after, took their departure from the Argyle, without intimating to any one where they were going.

The supposition, however, soon became current that they had gone to search for Deadwood Dick's buried treasure.

As soon as Roaring Ruth heard of their departure, she compressed her lips, and her eyes glittered with stern resolve.

"It's a fine game they're up to," she muttered. "They've evidently j'ined as pards, an' calculate to scoop in Deadwood Dick's ducats, and then vamoose. We'll see about that!"

Her half-muttered reverie was interrupted by the old miser, Jonas Argyle, who pleasantly bade her good-morning.

"If you have a little leisure," he said, "I'd like to have a word with you."

He motioned her to a seat, at a table, and seated himself opposite her.

"M bbe you're a little surprised that I should address you," he went on, "as I usually am set down as a surly old bear. Nevertheless, I was not always thus, I assure you. Trouble did all toward souring my life, and making me what I am—a stunned old crank. Yet I have some feelings left. Excuse me if I tell you, that your face strangely impresses me."

"Indeed! It can't be because it aire so pretty!" Ruth said, dryly.

"Not exactly, although there are tens of thousand faces homelier than yours. That's neither here nor there, however. I am not addicted to flattery, in the least. It is the fact that your face and your ways have a strange familiarity which causes me to speak to you. I once had a friend, and his face was like yours, and he was a wild devil-may-care fellow, of your own type of character. It occurred to me, that you might be related to him. It is now many years since last we met—we were both single, then—and, perhaps, he has fared with less disappointments in life, than I."

There was a tinge of sadness in the old man's tone that at once won Ruth's sympathy.

"It may be that you knew my father," she said. "He is now dead several months, and I, his daughter, seek the life of the man who murdered him. As yet, I have not had the satisfaction of meeting the monster, but time works wonders, and I do not despair. He is a doomed man!"

"The name! the name! Something tells me your father was my old-time chum and friend."

"My father's name was William Brainard. He used to be a scout, and was known as Iowa Bill!"

"The same! The same! What a coincidence that I should meet his child, after all these years. And you say he was murdered?"

"Not only he, but all of our family, except myself. They were massacred by a band of renegades and ruffians, led by a desperado named Ramon Ravee, whose life I now seek, in this bit of masquerade."

"Ah! then you have hopes of capturing him?"

"I have! I believe his lair to be in the mountains, not many miles from here, and that, sooner or later, I shall be able to bring him down."

"Sincerely I hope so, for years ago I was very fond of Iowa Bill, and he of me; consequently my interest in you is doubly increased. Taking this fact into consideration, I want to ask you what you think of Kid Karl's case?"

"Humph! There can be no doubt but what the fellow is innocent—not the slightest, in my mind. The thing was a put-up job on him. Just why, I am not prepared ter say, unless it was a matter of personal spite, or—"

"Or what?"

"This Masked Mose may be Harry Leclède himself!"

"I had not thought of that. We ought to have taken him in, too!"

"No. If he is Leclède it is better for him to have his liberty for a time. I want to use him as a stool pigeon, to find out where Deadwood Dick's mine and treasure are located!"

"Ah! yes. By the way, what are your impressions of Kid Karl?"

"Quite favorable. He is, at a glance, a roving chap, on the lookout for a fortune; brave enough in his way, but a little 'tenderfoot' in some particulars, and yet, withal, a first-class sort of fellow."

"Exactly my opinion. When I interceded, last night, it was for the reason that something in him strangely interested me. Do you know—"

Here the speculator lowered his tone, and spoke a few words rapidly.

Roaring Ruth looked amazed.

"No!" she ejaculated, incredulously.

"Fact," he responded, his little gray eyes twinkling. "But, not a word to any living soul! I know you can be trusted. Time must be taken—and Kid Karl must be freed."

"You can bet you have my heartiest co-operation on the latter score, so long as he does not prove to be Deadwood Dick's assassin. By the way, I hear that Jake McBride and Masked Mose have quitted the camp. Is it not probable they've taken time by the forelock, and gone to make a search for the buried treasure?"

"I presume so;—either that, or they have gone to Pineville, to trump up evidence against Kid Karl."

"I had not thought of that!" Ruth said, turning away.

Outside the rain came ceaselessly, and steadily down—such a rain as does more toward raising disastrous freshets than a fierce and sudden storm.

Already the little creek, which usually gurgled placidly through the gulch, had turned to a roaring torrent, and the flats of the gulch bottom were beginning to overflow in places.

After some deliberation, Roaring Ruth came to the conclusion that the first surmise in regard to the departure of Masked Mose and Jake McBride, was the most likely one, as it was hardly probable they would attempt a journey of any considerable distance, in the soaking rain, however much they might be inclined to do so.

During the forenoon she tried to gain an interview with Kid Karl, but was peremptorily refused the privilege, for the orders were that the prisoner be allowed no communication with outside parties, until the time arrived for his trial.

Not desiring to create any disturbance that would serve to dispel what favor she had already gained, Ruth could but acquiesce.

When the noon stage arrived, it brought her a letter, which was something unexpected, for she never had much correspondence.

The envelope was directed in a graceful, rather effeminate hand, though, plainly, the chirography was that of some one of the masculine gender.

"I wonder who it can be from?" Ruth muttered, staring at the inscription. "I don't remember of ever having seen that hand before."

She tore off the wrapper, and perused the missive with even more surprise than before. It ran as follows:

"ROARING RUTH:—Be alert, that others do not get the treasure ahead of you. If you show a clear hand you will win.
A FRIEND."

"Ha! what does that mean?" the puzzled girl murmured. "Does some one really know where the treasure is buried? It would seem so, or else this is sent to decoy me. I shall have to deliberate on this paper, and try to solve its meaning."

She read it over and over again. Nevertheless, she could gain no clear idea of its meaning, beyond what it expressed.

"Any one more superstitious than I would be inclined to suppose that it is a message from the dead!" she thought. "But there can be no possibility of such a thing. Spirits never communicate with mortals, or take part in earthly affairs once they vamoose; and as for Deadwood Dick, I'll swear he was a corpse when I left him. People don't generally become suddenly frisky again after breath has left their body for half an hour. No! Deadwood Dick is dead, sure and solid, and I'm to inherit his swag, providing I show a clear hand, eh? Blame me if I don't go to bathing my hands in bleaching-soda to-morrow."

She laughed musically at the idea, but she started as she felt a hand touch lightly upon the shoulder.

Wheeling about, she saw a stranger standing near her, with his broad sombrero gracefully lifted in his hand.

"Excuse me, miss!" he said, in a deep, com-

manding voice, "but did I not hear you mention the name of Deadwood Dick?"

Roaring Ruth gazed at him sharply before replying.

He was rather an unusual personage, in point of appearance, to meet in that locality, being of commanding figure, though not over average height. His age was perhaps over sixty, although his bearing was erect. It was his magnificent white hair and beard, that grew in great profusion, which gave him indications of age; for his eyes seemed to have lost none of their early brightness, and there were few, if any, crow's-tracks upon his forehead.

Aside from his spotless gray sombrero, his visible attire was a heavy Chinchilla overcoat, dark pants of fine cloth, and patent-leather boots upon his feet.

Weapons he carried none to view, unless it were the gold-headed ebony cane with which he partly supported himself.

So dignified, refined, and gentlemanly was his appearance that Roaring Ruth could but be favorably impressed with him.

"I believe I did mention to myself the name of Deadwood Dick, sir!" she admitted, after taking an optical inventory of him. "Why do you ask?"

"Because, lady, I have been looking for him, and your mention of his name suggested to me that I had at last stumbled on to a clew to his whereabouts. Excuse me, if my address was too impertinent. My name is old Jeff Jackson, at your service—a relic of the gay old days of '49."

"Indeed! Your question was not out of place, sir. May I inquire if you seek Deadwood Dick as a friend or as a foe?" Ruth demanded.

"If as a foe, I presume I'd be apt to derive but little information from you. Is it not so?" and he smiled, knowingly.

"I'm hardly prepared to say about that, sir. You have not answered my query, however!"

"True enough. Well, far from seeking him as a foe, I would find him as a friend. Can you tell me where he is?"

"No. I'm not a prophet. At last accounts, the fellow had passed in his checks, but I was not fortunate enough to learn which destination he was labeled for."

"What! Dick dead?"

"As a centurion door-mat!"

"You astound me! When did he die?"

"Waal, his earthly wings gave their final flutter last night. I attended him in his last moments and closed his eyes."

"Ah! how sad! Where did he die?"

"Way up among the mountains, in under a shelving ledge. I left him there, as I considered it as quiet a resting-place as I could find for him."

"You admired him, I infer!" Jackson said, eying her sharply.

A tinge of crimson appeared in the girl's either cheek.

"I don't know that you have any reason to infer anything of the kind," she answered, haughtily. "It is not likely I should be desperately stuck on a man whom I did not know over an hour!"

"Oh! of course not—of course not. Excuse me for mentioning such a thing. I thought, of course, that you had known him longer. Ha! ha! quite a laughable joke;—then, too, you must really forgive me, for I am always making some kind of a blunder. I am so sorry my old friend is dead. I'd like you to have known more of him, he was such a noble-minded fellow. Perhaps I could prevail upon you to accompany me and act as my guide to the spot where you left his remains?"

"I reckon maybe I might, as I intend goin' thar, d'rectly. But not now. It's too moist outside."

"Oh! certainly. It may not be raining to-morrow. I am very grateful for the information you have afforded, and I am open to reciprocate in any way in my power whenever you may see fit to command me!" and with these words he turned away.

Roaring Ruth watched him slyly for several minutes, though she apparently stared hard at the floor, with contracted brows.

Mr. Jefferson Jackson was another enigma. Either he was a born gentleman, full of honor, and refinement, or he was a consummate, polished rogue, who knew how to play his cards right well, and who had a snug little game on foot at the present time.

Her impression, however, was that the handsome old '49er was a *bona fide* specimen of the type of character he represented.

The day dragged away toward a close, with

no change in the weather outside. The miners lounged gloomily about the Argyle, and grumbled, smoked and drank, as the case might be. All were clearly "broke-up" over the dubious outlook, and even a shooting affray would have been a welcome *divertissement* to break the monotony of the situation.

Ruth saw this, and that at an opportunity offered to have a little sport; so she winked at Dutch Dave, and as a result, Jerry, the trained burro, speedily trotted complacently into the main room of the resort.

His appearance was the signal for a thunder of applause on the part of the miners, who naturally anticipated some fun.

Jerry made a leisurely circuit of the room, eying the assemblage inquisitively, as if in search of the man whose liberality would prompt him to "set 'em up."

That individual, however, did not seem to be present; therefore Jerry wagged his tail and flopped his huge ears in a sagacious manner, and the next minute stood with his forefeet planted upon the bar, while he bobbed his head serenely at Satan, the unique and spotless-linen beverage-compounder.

A roar from the crowd followed.

"Give him ile!"

"Perduce his Santa Cruz!"

"A bottle of bed-bug pizen fer the burro!"

These and many other utterances were shouted by lusty lungs.

"Who's goin' ter come down?" demanded Satan. "This ain't a free bar."

"I ginerally stand the expense of Jerry's St. Jacob's Ile," Roaring Ruth responded. "When he winks fer likker, therefore do you produce it."

The stimulant was accordingly produced, and Jerry "got away" with it without a demur.

"Now then, fellers!" Ruth called out, "jest fer a little fun, I'll bet fifty dollars my colt hyer kin throw any man in this room who attempts to ride him!"

"Ex-ke-use me, lady, but I'm open to take that bet!" a voice cried.

And Jeff Jackson, the '49er, stepped to the front.

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE MOUTH OF THE MINE.

WHEN Masked Mose and Jack McBride left Devil's Diggings, they went well mounted and well armed.

Little or nothing was said until the camp was left behind, for the rain dashing into their faces, did not make conversation an easy matter.

Finally, the masked stranger said:

"I reckon our departure from the Diggin's won't excite much comment, unless it stirs up that she catamount, Roaring Ruth."

"Cuss her!" McBride gritted; "I'll get square with her yet!"

"So she rather lammed you, hey?"

"Lord, yes! She pummeled me right an' left, like I was a baby. I never got sech a haulin' over the coals in my life, afore!"

"Oh! she's undoubtedly a screamer. But, if we play things right, you an' I has got a regular roast. I, of course, know where the Deadwood Dick mine is, and I intend to work it for all it's worth until I git my claws onto the buried treasure—then you can hev your turn."

"You're Harry Leclède, then?"

"No, I am not! It don't matter who I am. The fellow in durance, at the Argyle, is Leclède, and I mean to keep him out of the way, or else he might interfere with my plans."

"S'posin' ye let a feller know your plans?" McBride growled. "I ain't jest too perlite 'bout trustin' a stranger too fur."

"Of course; you'd be a fool to do it. I'll prove to ye that I'm on the square, fast enough, and don't ye forgit it. Ye see natur' endowed me wi' the gift o' sizin' up character, purty pert like, and I spotted you out as a man whom I could trust. My plan is this: we go to the mine, and size it up—something I haven't had a chance to do, yet. Then, we'll return to the Diggin's, and see to it that Kid Karl, alias Leclède, gets his deserts. There must be no fumbling in the matter; it has got to be a straight out an' out job. After the feller is done up, I suddenly disappear, and you go to work. You pick out as many safe men as will follow you, and secretly make a stampede for the mine. Select only such as are utterly reliable. Once in the mine, Devil's Diggings and the balance of its inhabitants can go to the devil. As for us, we will work the mine, and share equal, thus preserving good will until the mine plays out!"

"And, ef you find the buried treasure, you drop out?"

"You bet!"

"I reckon that ain't fair. Ef I go inter ther bizness, I opine I orter share with ye."

"Well, I'll not be porkopolis. If I find the swag, I'll give ye a good-sized bite of it."

"Then, it's a bargain. I reckon Devil's Diggin's is on her last legs, anyhow!"

Heavily though the rain poured down, they rode on, but at a rate of speed necessarily slow. Turning out of the gulch abruptly, into a dense jungle of small pines, they began to toil up the mountain.

In entering the jungle they had to cross the gulch creek at a point where it formed a sort of pool upon the bottom-lands, and accordingly the tracks made by the horses' feet were wholly obliterated.

The strip of pines ran almost perpendicularly to the mountain's top, and a sort of animal trail, time-worn and tortuous, followed within the labyrinthian passages of the trees.

The ascent was difficult in the extreme, but the plucky, strong-limbed horses were equal to the emergency, and at last a halt was made, many feet above the gulch bottom.

The spot was a sort of bench on the mountain-side, and was still within the confines of the pine belt, where the light was none too plentiful.

"We dismount here!" Masked Mose said, sliding from his saddle. "The rest of the journey is on foot. It is not far."

Swerving to the right, from the forest, they picked their way among the crags and rocks until they came to another slight plateau, opening off of which was a dark and narrow fissure, which appeared to penetrate into the very bowels of the mountain.

"There is the entrance to the mine," Masked Mose announced—"the place where Deadwood Dick and Leclède took out their sixty thousand dollars' worth of stuff. There's a subterranean passage or chamber within which is as dark as the shades of Hades!"

"I was always of an opinion that them aire shades war ruther rose-tinted!" McBride said, suggestively.

"Mebbe you'll know for sure, hereafter. But come. There's a stock of dry torches just within the passageway. We'll explore and get back to the Diggin's."

They advanced toward the entrance, to follow the suggestion, when Masked Mose suddenly leaped back with a startled oath.

Fastened upon the rock directly in front of him was a paper containing the following words, which evidently had been written by a finger dipped in human blood!

"BEWARE!"

"Woe unto him who shall enter, or seek to work, this mine. Beware!"

"THE HAND OF FATE."

Masked Mose uttered a bitter oath, while McBride, figuratively speaking, "turned blue around the gills."

"What does it mean?" he gasped, backing off in alarm.

"Mean!" Masked Mose replied. "That some one has been here! But I'll devilish soon rout whoever has dared usurp my rights. Come along, McBride!"

"Nary!" McBride growled. "None in mine coffee, ef ye please. If you find everything sagaciating salubriously, I'll then propel after you; but not till then."

"Bah! Pull yer tools, and foller me, an' et's a thousand dollars to you, when we get back to the Diggin's."

"Enuff. Scoot!"

With a grim glitter in his eye, Masked Mose drew his revolvers, and led the way.

CHAPTER X.

JERRY FINDS A MASTER.

THE extraordinary acceptance of Roaring Ruth's challenge, by the '49er, caused a chuckle to escape the spectators at the Argyle.

The idea of an old man like him, attempting to cling to the back of a trained and bucking burro, was preposterous, to say the least, and even Roaring Ruth gazed at the old man in astonishment.

"Ye don't mean it?" she ejaculated, turning to him. "Ye don't purpose ter give the undertaker a job, so soon after your arrival in the Diggin's?"

"Most assuredly I do not, young lady," he replied, with dignified promptness. "I happen to need fifty dollars just at the present time, and I ride that mule!"

"But I say you can't do it! But one man ever did it, an' he got his neck broken the second time he tried it. So take warning—I won't issue you a life insurance policy, ef ye try ter tackle Jerry!"

"Oh! of course not—I take all the responsibilities upon myself, like a little major. If I conquer the burro, so that he allows me to ride him, you give me fifty dollars?"

"From the bottom of my heart!"

"I'd prefer it from the bottom of your pocket, if it is all the same to you," he said, dryly.

He then approached Jerry, who stood gazing at him, as if comprehending all that had been said.

"Jeremiah, I'm goin' to ride you!" Jackson announced. "I don't suppose you have any objections, eh?"

Jerry bobbed his head in the affirmative, which elicited another howl of laughter from the miners.

Patting the sagacious animal on the back, a moment, Jackson threw his right leg over him, and was mounted, and sat there with folded arms, and a smiling face.

At first, Jerry made no hostile move, but actually trembled, where he stood, as if realizing that his master had "arrived in town."

Roaring Ruth looked her surprise, but said not a word. She felt positive that it was out of the question for Jerry to submit thus passively.

And she was right. A moment later his hind parts began to gradually rise, to a perpendicular position, even as the gymnast of a circus balances himself on his hands, and elevates his heels in the air.

One out of a dozen men, could hardly have remained seated, but Mr. Jackson was not disconcerted. Even when Jerry's body was perpendicularly poised, the stranger remained on the mule's back, his feet securely locked together beneath the animal's belly, his head resting back against its rump, and his arms composedly folded.

Nor did the reaction unseat him.

With a revengeful squeal, Jerry then began to pitch in, with all his might and main. He reared and bucked, whirled, lay down and rolled over—but when he arose, Jefferson Jackson was calmly seated upon his back.

The burro now became fairly furious, for he evidently enjoyed the ceremony of dumping a rider as much as did the spectators, but to be baffled by an aged stranger, seemed to him the height of indignity.

Nevertheless, all his favorite pranks and practices failed to unhorse the '49er, and if it were possible to a burro to look ugly, Jerry did that same thing.

Finally, he ceased to buck, and glared savagely about him, as if in search of some other method of getting rid of the man upon his back.

Spying a large window, at the front of the saloon, he made for it, his intent only too evident; but, if he thought to scare Jefferson Jackson, he reck'd without his host, for lengthwise of the burro, did the plucky stranger throw himself; there was a crash, and his would-be victim disappeared.

Only for an instant, however.

Then they came flying back through the open window-casement, from which the first plunge, had carried both glass and sash.

Neither Jerry nor Jackson were harmed, and the former now looked strangely docile, for a wonder.

His first action was to trot up to the bar, and in his usual way, place his forefeet upon it, as an intimation of what he wanted.

Satan uncorked a bottle and poured the contents down the voracious animal's throat, whereupon he once more dropped on all fours. Then, with renewed vigor, he again began bucking, making some mighty leaps, that would have thrown expert riders.

Roaring Ruth watched the proceedings with interest, her gaze hardly once leaving the face of Jeff Jackson.

It was plainly her belief that, if he was an old man, he was a remarkable one.

Once, she saw something, which strengthened her suspicions, if she had any. She saw Jackson suddenly clap his hand, for an instant, to his head, at a point where his hair and beard met, just above his ear. As his fingers perceptibly worked it immediately occurred to Ruth that Jackson's hair and beard were false, and that he was not what he claimed.

The burro finally ceased his antics, and turning his head, gazed at his mistress in a way as much as to say:

"It's no use, old gal. I give 'er up as a bad job!"

And the crowd, catching the spirit of the occasion, applauded, vociferously.

Jackson turned to Ruth, a twinkle in his eyes. "Well, young lady, does Jeremiah give up beat?" he demanded, pleasantly.

"He does," Ruth replied, "and you richly deserve the money, even if you did spoil my chances of making a stake. Jerry gives up, like a little man, and will stand by you, in any row!"

Jackson dismounted, and received the fifty dollars, with a profound bow.

As for Jerry, he gave vent to a consumptive cough, stepped over to a near-by table, and then laid down as if in very disgust.

He was, for once, clearly "bushed."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPECTER.

IT lacked but little of nightfall when Jake McBride and Masked Mose made their reappearance in Devil's Diggin's, and, judging by outward evidences, their mysterious journey had not been crowned with much success.

Aside from being soaking wet, they evidently had passed through some sort of a siege which had resulted in their personal demoralization.

McBride had a bullet-wound through the fleshy part of his cheek and another through his ear, which had left that projection hanging by a small ligament, and his hat was so full of bullet-holes that it would have made a good sieve.

His left leg was bandaged, and he limped when walking; and another stray bullet had plowed a furrow through his mustache, cleaning out a line of bristles, sleek and clean.

Masked Mose had hardly fared as badly.

He wore his left arm in a sling, but otherwise was unhurt.

The advent of the pair in the Argyle, as may be supposed, created a sensation, and the unfortunates were immediately plied with queries as to how they came by their wounds.

But the answers were evasive.

"Oh, we got into a fracas with a gang o' footpads, an' they were too avoirdupois fer us!" Masked Mose growled, while McBride surlily corroborated the statement.

All further questioning effected naught. If the precious pair had been "done up" by road-agents, they were certainly in no mood for expatiating on the fact.

So they were left to the task of drying off externally, and wetting up internally, at which latter they appeared exceedingly handy.

Roaring Ruth saw them from a distance, as she was seated at a table, near to which stood Jefferson Jackson engaged in smoking a fragrant weed.

"D'ye see them two daisies?" she inquired of him, as she idly shuffled a deck of cards.

"Yes, I was just observing them. They look rather broken up."

"So they are. They went out to hunt Deadwood Dick's gold mine, and their appearances seem to indicate that they found it."

"Exactly; though they say they had a scrimmage with footpads."

"That's a blind—regular shutter. They're too close-mouthed to make such a yarn at all plausible."

"Maybe Deadwood Dick isn't dead, and was at home to give 'em a warm reception."

"Such a thought has just occurred to me. But I am positive Deadwood Dick was dead when I and Dutch Dave left him."

"To verify the fact it will be necessary to revisit the place, I suppose?"

"Yes; and to satisfy myself, I am going to do so this very night. How would you like to accompany me?"

"That depends somewhat on the weather. I am getting a little too old to recklessly expose myself to the elements. By the way, who is the fellow that wears the mask?"

"Calls himself Masked Mose. For my part, I believe him to be the real Harry Leclède, who murdered Deadwood Dick."

"He may be, because what other reason could he have for keeping his features thus concealed?"

"To conceal his identity, of course—for instance, like yourself!" Roaring Ruth suggested, staring at him quizzically.

Mr. Jackson started, and darted her back a sharp glance.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"I mean that your little racket works well on all but me," she replied so coolly as not to give him much chance to manifest surprise. "You came near dislodging your false whiskers while riding the burro, and I chanced to catch you at it—that's all."

He bit his lip with vexation.

"Well, what of it?" he demanded. "Hasn't a person a right to wear a false beard, in lieu of his own, if so he chooses?"

"To be sure. Did I say he hadn't? As long as society allows masquerade parties, I presume there can be no objection to individual masquerading, only that it don't give an impression of good character and purpose."

She spoke too significantly for any one to misunderstand.

He turned away impatiently, and walked toward his room, followed by laughter from Ruth's cherry lips that fairly exasperated him. Ruth did not see him again that night.

Darkness fell like a somber shroud over Devil's Diggings, with the rain still pouring steadily down.

The water of the creek was constantly increasing in volume and velocity, and its roar was audible within the Argyle. Some of the veteran miners prophesied that the gulch bottom would be entirely overflowed by day-break; accordingly a patrol was organized to keep watch, and give warning in case of imminent danger.

About nine o'clock, Roaring Ruth donned a rubber, hard-weather coat, and went out of doors, ostensibly to look at the creek, but in reality to visit the place where she had left the remains of Deadwood Dick.

It was no considerable distance up the mountain, but she calculated she could get back to the Diggings ere suspicion would be aroused at her absence.

She was beginning to seriously doubt whether the famous ex-road agent was dead, as she had believed.

The peculiar letter she had received—the banged-up appearance of McBride and Masked Mose, and something else—all tended to favor the suspicion.

The something else was the discovery of Jefferson Jackson's wonderful riding proclivities, and the fact that his beard and hair were false!

She hurried away swiftly and untiringly up the mountain, paying little heed to the rain that beat in her face, and pelted her outer garments.

The way was rugged, and in places dangerous, and the dense gloom prevented the trail being easily followed, even after the eyes became accustomed to it.

In due time, however, Roaring Ruth stepped upon the rocky shelf where she had left Deadwood Dick's body reposing 'neath the great overhanging ledge.

Having provided herself with her dark lantern, she soon had a light, and was able to observe her surroundings.

In the place where she had left the body lying, it did not lay.

In fact, it was gone altogether!

"As I expected!" Ruth muttered, in disgust. "He did not die at all. Was he kidding me, then? No, that ain't likely, for it turns out there is something in his claim about a gold mine, and buried treasure."

She peered about for a last time.

"Ah!"

She stepped forward, and picked up a piece of memorandum paper, which she had not before observed.

It contained writing in pencil.

The contents were as follows;

"Whoever left the body of Deadwood Dick here, to be devoured by the wolves, must have been brought up where education was very limited, and excluded all manner of human sympathy from its lessons."

That was all.

There was no signature, and the writing was in a cramped, irregular hand.

Roaring Ruth read it over and over, with dilating eyes. Then she sat down upon a boulder, with the lamp in her hand, and perused it again.

What did it mean? Did it signify that Deadwood Dick really was dead, and that some person had run across his remains, and given them interment, leaving this missive behind to rebuke the person who previously left the body lying on the ledge?

It would seem so, and yet—

How did the author of this missive know that any person had been with the deceased at the time of his death?

It was a poser!

"I do not believe Deadwood Dick is dead at all!" Ruth said, unconsciously speaking aloud. "And if he is alive, he, it must have been, who wrote this mean letter. Pshaw! I don't be-

lieve he did that—I formed a better opinion of him. If he had lived, I almost believe I—"

The loneliness of her situation seemed suddenly to dawn upon her, and she glanced nervously around her.

She uttered a low cry of genuine horror.

Below her, and not a dozen feet from her, she saw a tall, white object, which looked decidedly like the traditional ghost.

She turned off the light of her lantern, and the apparition became much plainer to view. It stood there motionless, with one outstretched arm pointing toward her.

In horrible fascination it held her gaze, and she was powerless to resist it.

Then it suddenly turned, and the white arm pointed down toward Devil's Diggings.

Roaring Ruth understood the meaning thus conveyed.

She was admonished to leave the mountain, and return to the mining-camp.

Fearing to disobey, she left the ledge, and hurried away.

CHAPTER XII.

A GRAND COURT.

THE next morning dawned over Devil's Diggings as rainy and dismal as had been its predecessor. Ceaselessly and heavily the deluge came down, soaking the earth, and adding to the fury of the mountain streams.

Fortunately, the situation at the diggings was not yet so dangerous as to warrant the miners in fleeing to higher ground for safety, although the bottom of the gulch was overflowed almost all around the Argyle, which had been built upon a slight elevation.

The feeling of gloom, however, among the miners still existed, for there was no telling exactly when the rain or flood would abate.

There was a little break to the monotony, however. It was the day for the trial of Kid Karl for the murder of Deadwood Dick, and preparations were early begun, for this was certainly the most auspicious event of legal form that had occurred in the history of Devil's Diggings.

Judge Tamarack Splinter, of course, was about, and literally as lively as a flea. He was attired in his Sunday best, had combed his fringe of hair for the first time in weeks, and his nose shone with a brilliancy supposed to be in keeping with his judicial wit.

He was the important man of the day. He, in his legal capacity, was to represent the "commonwealth" of Devil's Diggings, and he proudly asserted that his crushing argument would terrify the prisoner into a full confession; while, as for Kid Karl, there seemed little probability that he would have any defense, except what his own statement could offer.

Early in the morning McBride and Masked Mose were admitted to the room of the prisoner, and found him lounging upon the bed, smoking his pipe.

He did not seem in the least uncomfortable in his new quarters, and regarded his visitors with cool defiance.

"Well, I see ye'r' heer, yet," Masked Mose sneered, closing the door behind them. "How d'ye feel by this time?"

"As usual, I believe," Kid Karl answered, calmly. "I trust you didn't expect to see me crying?"

"Well, no—that is, not exactly. You've got good stuff in you, Leclède, and it's a pity for a fellow like you to stretch hemp. Ye orter have surrendered—then, possibly, things would 'a' went lighter wi' ye."

"It makes little difference. The fools were warned of the penalty if they didn't keep off, and so I don't hold myself responsible for what happened. What do you two knaves want here?"

"Well, sir, we cum to notify ye that yer trial comes off to-day."

"You have then imposed upon yourselves a thankless task. I was aware of the fact, sir."

"Indeed! I thought ye might have forgotten it. But see here—you! We cum to offer ye a chance to escape!"

"A chance to escape—what?"

"Yer trial—and yer sure sertain execution arterwards."

"Impossible! I do not propose to become a fugitive from justice. I shall meet my trial, and go forth a free man!"

"Ha! ha! Yer confidence is amusing in the face of the circumstances. If ye stand trial ye will be convicted and strung up—that's flat! There's no two ways about it. If ye agree to what I propose there's a chance for a bright future for you. Listen to what I have to say and you'll agree that I am right. You are

Harry Leclède. There is no sort of use of your attempting to deny it, for I know. We—McBride and I—have discovered the Deadwood Dick mine, and obtained possession of it, after a struggle. We three, here together, are the only ones now possessing any knowledge of the whereabouts of the mine. To us three, therefore, it rightfully belongs, providing you are with us. You know where that sixty thousand dollars is secreted. Take us to the spot, we will divide it equally together, and as a trio work the Deadwood Dick mine!" and Mose, in his earnestness, dropped the rude language of the mines and spoke with perfect propriety.

Kid Karl smiled as he listened.

"A right clever plan, ain't it," he said, when Mose had finished. "But, I am forced to inform you that I have no knowledge whatever of the alleged buried treasure of Deadwood Dick, nor would I become a party to a compact to cheat Deadwood Dick or this Harry Leclède, whoever he may be, out of what justly belongs to them. You have heard me, and my answer is final. So go!"

"Very well! You have chosen between life and death, and selected the latter. I will see to it that you get a full measure of it!" Masked Mose hissed.

He and McBride then left the room, and the door was locked after them.

Their scheme had failed in this direction, and they were doubly determined that Kid Karl should never leave the Diggings alive.

In the mean time Roaring Ruth was not idle.

On the preceding night, after returning from the mountain, she recalled the fact of the approaching trial of Kid Karl, and realized that some preparations must be made for his defense.

The first thing she did was to seek a confidential interview with Jonas Argyle, during which the latter said:

"Do so! do so! You know why I am so interested in the young man. Spare no pains to secure his vindication, and, my girl, ye shall not go unrewarded!"

Accordingly she at once dispatched her companion, Dutch Dave, to Pineville, to make inquiries in regard to Kid Karl's having been there, the day of the murder, and in case he had, to obtain substantial proof of the fact.

On the favorable results of his report were based her strongest hopes of clearing the prisoner.

Dutch Dave did not arrive back until morning, and at a glimpse of him Ruth knew that his errand had failed to "pan out" well.

"Vel, I vent there!" he growled, "und got me soaked all over, und dot vas all. Der pe no such veller as Kid Karl dere, nor no von vot look like him. He deffs lies—dot's all!"

"You are sure? You made energetic inquiries?"

"Enershetic! Vy, py shimminy, I axed effery son-off-a-gun in der camp, unt dey all shook deir heads, vink von eye, und dells me nix!"

"Then Kid Karl lied?" Ruth muttered, disappointedly. "I am not so sure now but what he may be Leclède."

Preparations for the trial went on, and by ten o'clock everything was in readiness.

Seats had been provided for every one, and when ten o'clock arrived all were occupied.

Kid Karl was then brought forth by the two guards.

Judge Tamarack Splinter, in all his judicial glory, and and looking as wise, stern and imposing as a Philadelphia police magistrate, occupied a drygoods box, with a smaller one in front of him, as a desk.

The jury, which, he it said to his credit, the judge had selected from the most disinterested citizens, were seated just in front of the judicial throne.

Kid Karl was placed opposite the judge, where he came within the full glare of the judicial eye.

Such witnesses as proposed to testify were invited to be seated at the right. The citizens were at the left.

When all was in readiness, his Honor arose, with magisterial dignity, and glared severely over the assemblage, as if to awe and impress them, from the start, with the magnitude of his position.

"Feller-citizens!" he began with ministerial gravity, "it becomes my duty, in behalf of the Commonwealth of Devil's Diggings, and as judge and only legal representative thereof, to try the prisoner at the bar, for murder in the first degree. The crime charged, viz:—The people vs. Kid Karl, alias Harry Leclède, for the murder of his partner, one Deadwood Dick, a

miner. Prisoner at the bar, have you provided yourself with counsel for the defense?"

"I haven't been allowed the opportunity of doing so, yet!" Kid replied, rather grimly, as he looked over the rough audience.

"Then, sir!" cried a voice, "if you have no objections, I will act as your counsel!" And a female pushed forward into view. "I am Judith Green, from Chicago, and a regularly admitted member of the bar!"

Every one stared.

The female who had thus suddenly appeared, was a type of character hitherto unknown to Devil's Diggings.

She was young—that was evidenced by her shapely features, and soft complexion—and possessed of a good figure. Her attire, however, consisted of a bedraggled calico dress, a coarse pair of shoes, a flaring red shawl, and a bonnet, remarkable for its oddity and age. Her eyes were hidden behind ogreish green goggles, and she wore her hair combed down smoothly on her forehead, after the style of a few generations ago.

In one hand she carried a well-worn and lank looking carpet-bag, while her right clutched a large umbrella.

There was a snort of laughter as she stood gazing about, which Judge Splinter checked, in a measure, by rapping smartly upon his desk.

"Order in the court—order!" he yelled.

"Madame—"

"Excuse me, sir, miss, if you please!" she interrupted. "Remember that, if you are a respecter of persons, as every learned judge should be."

Splinter's bosom immediately proudly swelled, as from the effect of an overdose of water and dried apples.

"Gracious, Miss Green!" he orated, clapping his "plug" deftly upon his head, and doffing it again, with a Chesterfieldian air, "you will surely excuse my oversightedness. I am Judge Tamarack Splinter, at your service, and I represent the Commonwealth, in the case about to be tried. Can it be possible you would take the opposition side, against a man of my legal attainments?"

"Yas, I do!" Miss Green declared, with a strong nasal twang, "and if I don't fetch the handsome young feller out, scot free, then Judith Green never studied law!"

"Very well. As it is fair for the prisoner to have counsel, let the old gal fight fer him!" Splinter said, dryly.

And thinking that some amusing developments might follow, the crowd did not dissent.

Accordingly, a chair was placed on a deal table, near the judge, and Judith Green was helped to a seat upon it—umbrella, carpet-bag, and all.

The case was then taken up, in earnest.

The first witness called, for the prosecution, was Masked Mose.

On being sworn, he gave testimony that his name was Moses Markel, but that he was usually known as Masked Mose, from wearing a mask to hide a hideous deformity of the features.

"I object to this man's testimony, on the grounds that it is illegal for a man to testify, with his mug covered up, so that no one can judge whether he's lying or no!" interposed Judith Green, stamping her umbrella on the floor.

"Silence! Who's runnin' this hyer court?" roared the Judge. "The jury's verdict settles such things as that. The relator will proceed to testify."

Deponent further stated, that on the day of the murder he was on his way from Pineville to Devil's Diggings, in company with a comrade, when he discovered a man climbing the mountain-side, and acting in a rather suspicious manner. Prompted by curiosity, they shadowed him, and at one time got near enough to hear him say aloud, "Oh! Deadwood Dick, your doom is sealed. The mine shall belong to me, and the treasure, too, if I can find it." By-and-by, another man appeared in view, and the shadowed man drew a bead on him, and crying "Die, Deadwood Dick!" shot him through the heart, killing him, instantly. The assassin then fled. The comrades followed him, first to the secret mine, and thence to Devil's Diggings, where deponent caused his arrest. The prisoner at the bar was identically and positively the same man who had killed Deadwood Dick!

"Have ye any cross-examination to make?" Splinter asked, turning to Green.

"Not at present," was the quiet answer. "There's plenty of time for that yet."

Bill Blinker, a ruffianly-looking loafer, was the next witness. He claimed to be a pard of Masked Mose, and his testimony was a straight corroboration of the first deponent's.

McBride deposed that he and Masked Mose had, the previous day, visited the scene of the murder, buried the unfortunate miner, and taken note that he had been shot directly through the heart.

Several others testified as to the arrest of Kid Karl, and so forth.

The defense was then begun.

More interest now seemed prevailing.

Kid Karl took the stand and was sworn.

"Ye kin conduct the examination of the prisoner," Splinter said loftily, glowering down upon Judith. "I do not consider it my duty to overtax myself."

Miss Green seemed elated at this.

"Your name is Kid Karl?" she said, surveying the prisoner.

"It is."

"Have you ever used the name of Harry Leclède?"

"I have!"

Sensation in the court-room.

"Under what circumstances?"

"Leclède was my *nom de plume* when I met and joined Deadwood Dick in a prospecting venture. I can scarcely assign any motive for adopting it more than that I did so."

"How long were you a prospecting partner of Deadwood Dick?"

"For a matter of three months."

"Were you on friendly terms together?"

"We were. I learned to look upon him as a brother."

"Ever quarrel?"

"Never."

"What were the financial results of your partnership?"

"Thirty thousand apiece. This was, from time to time, converted into coin. Finally we fell to gambling, with the understanding that the ultimate winner of all was to resign in favor of the other, and vamoose."

"Well, who won?"

"Deadwood Dick."

"What then?"

"I asked for employment, and he granted it. He seemed to believe that I had designs on stealing his treasure. So, in the dead of night when I was sleeping, he removed it to a secret hiding-place and buried it. The next day he left for a hunt, while I labored in the mine. A few days before, he had mentioned something about coming down here after some tobacco, but regarded it as dangerous to our interests. The day passed, but when night drew on Dick did not return. I thought it rather queer, but waited a while. At last I came to the conclusion that he had come down here, and so started down the mountain, expecting to find him returning."

"Not meeting him, I came on, growing constantly anxious for his welfare. When I reached this place I resolved to enter, to learn if he had not been drawn into a game of cards. What followed is known to nearly all now present, except, perhaps to my counsel. I was charged with a foul crime by yonder lying vagabond, and was attacked. You all know I made a fair offer of remaining, to stand my trial. The men I killed, I killed in self-defense, and I'd do the same thing again. But, as there is a God in Heaven, I never harmed a hair of Deadwood Dick's head. Another thing, to show the character of my accusers: Masked Mose and McBride came to my room this morning, and offered to set me free, if I would tell them where Dick's treasure was buried. That's all I think of, just at present!"

"That's quite sufficient!" the judge thundered. "I will now give the case to the—"

"Say, hold up, won't you?" Roaring Ruth cried. "I opine I've got a little say in this. Swear, me, ef you please!"

She was sworn, and testified to the facts already known to the reader, including her visit to the spot where she had left Deadwood Dick for dead, and her failure to find his body, and her belief that he still lives. She made no mention of encountering the specter, as she did not believe it advisable.

"I believe, your Honor," spoke up Miss Green, "that one of your clients testified as to burying the remains of this Deadwood Dick?"

"They did!" Splinter reluctantly acknowledged, now not so perfectly sure that he was going to win his great case.

"Very good. We will deploy a posse of citizens to visit the tomb, and thus make sure the crime has really been committed, before we can conscientiously give the case to that most august body, the jury!"

Masked Mose uttered a violent oath.

"That won't work!" he snarled: "S'pose we might as well acknowledge we didn't bury the cuss. We dumped his carcass into the creek!"

"Cleverly caught in a lie, which breaks your testimony. Judge Splinter, as a man of great wisdom, you must see how the matter stands. We cannot proceed with the case, on the unreliable evidence of the still more unreliable vagabonds who have been playing so bold a hand. I demand that no further action be taken in the matter, until it can be learned whether Deadwood Dick is, or is not dead!"

The judge eyed her, sharply.

Now, just at this point, a new thought had popped into his noddle.

He was getting along in years, and had never as yet, been so successful in love affairs as to lay claim to a Mrs. S.

Here was a smart, shrewd woman, evidently an old maid, yet comely and promising.

Perhaps, by a little amelioration, he could—well, make a hit!

The fact struck him so impressively that he at once wilted becomingly and signified his approbation.

"Fair sister of the bar," he said, donning and doffing his hat—a peculiarity of his, by the way—it is with feelings of approval that I, a stern old oak of jurisprudence, must bow to the justice of your suggestion, with all its sensible procedure. The prisoner shall be remanded to jail until we have further developments to work upon."

"I propose the prisoner be admitted to bail. I'll put up five thousand dollars, to be forfeited if he is not on hand when wanted!" cried Jonas Argyle.

"I object! I strenuously object, *in totum*!" shouted Splinter. "Where, in all this glorious Camp and Commonwealth o' Devil's Diggings—where, I say, kin you find the galoot that can be trusted with five thousand dollars?"

A roar of laughter and applause at this strikingly sensible sally, fairly made the building tremble.

Argyle himself, for the first time since the foundation of the camp, was aroused into a hearty laugh.

"True enough!" he allowed. "But you all know me, and I'll be responsible for the fellow's appearance to the value of all I'm worth."

After considerable dissension, it was finally satisfactorily settled. Jonas Argyle became surety for Kid Karl's appearance. In case Karl could not be caught, should he forfeit his bail, Argyle was to contribute five thousand dollars, to be divided, *pro rata*, between the enraged citizens of Devil's Diggings.

Judge Splinter then pronounced Karl free, for the time being, and warned one and all against again provoking him to self-defense.

Kid Karl was then liberated and received the weapons that had been taken from him at the time of his capture.

Among the first to congratulate him was Roaring Ruth.

"I am glad to see this much of a point gained," she said, simply. "I was afraid after I found that you had not been at Pineville things would go hard with you. By the way, our friend, Miss Green, worked about all the good that has been done yet."

"Who is she?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"Is it original do you think?"

"I've half a notion not; but, if not, she's well made up, and knows her biz!"

"I should say so. Somehow, she has too deucedly a girlish face for the character she takes."

"Somewhat my opinion, too. You are really Deadwood Dick's pard?"

"That was. It grieves me sorely to think I should be accused of killing him, when I had formed so warm an attachment for him, that I did not even regret it when he won the last of my thirty thousand. Did he believe me to be his assassin?"

"I think he was loth to believe such a thing, and yet, could lay the crime reasonably to no one else."

"He should have known me better. But, tell me—do you really believe him dead?"

"I hardly know. Partly to satisfy myself, it was, that I took the trip last night."

"And the result was naught?"

"On the contrary, some one's ghost—your pard's, I suppose—came, and ordered me to *git*—that is, motioned me to return here!"

"Nonsense!" Kid Karl laughed. "There is no such a thing as a ghost!"

"Thar ain't? Waal, now, I ain't over scrumptious, an' yet I allus held the same opinion, and poohed! and bahed! and all that sort o' thing. But, I'll be tuk sick wi' the snakes, ef I ain't about cross-ways o' the fence on the subj'ct now!"

"Nonsense, I say again! A dare-devil girl of your grit, weakening to such an utter delusion. I'm surprised!"

"Can't help it. A white figger suddenly appeared almost near to me, and pointed for me to git up an' git. You can just bet I got. I didn't ax no questions, nor give back no chaff, but moved! An' that arm pointed at me, till I couldn't see it no longer!"

"If this is a fact, I have little doubt that my pard still lives. But, were it so, why was he not here to my rescue?"

"He was!"

Both Kid Karl and Roaring Ruth started and glanced around them.

No one was within twenty feet from where they were standing!

Yet the voice had sounded as if almost directly applied to their ears.

The majority of the miners were all collected about McBride, who was treating, at the bar.

Jefferson Jackson stood fully twenty feet away, puffing at a cigar.

Miss Judith Green was seated at a table, quietly and unobtrusively making a meal off from crackers and cheese, from her carpet-bag.

Surely, no one was near enough to have heard their conversation; yet the answer seemed to indicate to the contrary.

"What infernal mystery is this?" Kid Karl growled.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BESOM OF DESTRUCTION.

ROARING RUTH laughed:

"Either we have the Old Nick among us, or else a clever ventriloquist—and, even, if the latter suggestion be correct, how in the name of common sense could he have overheard our conversation?"

"Sound carries a considerable distance, in such an apartment as this," Kid Karl said, reflectively. "It's a remarkably strange case. No one appears to be looking this way."

Ruth did not reply, and Karl soon sauntered over to where Judith Green was contentedly munching her cheese and crackers.

"You will excuse me, for interrupting your dinner!" he said, "but I could not longer persuade myself to delay expressing to you my heartfelt gratitude for the manner in which you so kindly and skillfully interested yourself in my behalf."

"No thanks are required, sir," Miss Green said in a voice soft and sweet, and strongly in contrast with her former speech. "I happened to know that you were in need of assistance, hence did not hesitate to volunteer. You are not out of danger yet, however."

"So I am satisfied. By the way, you have betrayed to me that you are not what you seem. May I make bold to ask, if we have ever met, before to-day?"

"Not to my knowledge, although I have seen you."

"That is strange. Pray explain."

"Oh no! When, where, or how I saw you, does not matter, now. Enough is it to say, that I have seen you, and chose to take sides with you. Mind you, you are not out of the woods, yet. If you have discovered that I am not what I represent, it was because I chose to let you discover it. I trust you will have the good sense to keep the fact mum."

"Rest assured of that. Your interest in my behalf only serves to increase my interest in yourself. I trust our acquaintance, so strangely begun, may not as suddenly end."

And bowing gallantly, he passed on, secretly hoping he had made an impression; for he was ready to swear that Miss Judith Green was a fairy in disguise.

After lingering awhile longer in the saloon, he sought his room.

The temporary respite granted Kid Karl was not generally regarded with favor.

And, if there were any undecided men, who, as in politics, were not certain which way to turn, there was a large chance that they would be won over to the antagonistic side, as McBride and Masked Mose had put down sufficient money, so that a "free bar" was assured for several hours to come.

As a consequence, in a place like Devil's Diggings, such an unwonted streak of liberality conducted to capture public sympathy; to resist a chance to get drunk for nothing, was a thing not to be thought of, and for Masked Mose's whisky they gave him their influence.

And while the conviviality waxed warm and enthusiastic, Masked Mose improved an opportunity to slip from the crowd, and saunter near where Miss Judith Green was finishing up the last of her cheese and crackers.

"Woman!" he hissed between his clinched teeth, "I fancy we have met before!"

Judith looked deliberately up, at him, through her green goggles.

"Laws sakes, you nasty brute, of course we have! I'm Judith Green, attorney at law, who just beat ye at yer own game. S'pect yer mem'ry ain't very overly good, eh?"

It was the old rasping nasal voice that now spoke, instead of the soft, pleasant tones that had greeted the hearing of Kid Karl.

Masked Mose uttered a snarling curse, and stalked on.

"P'raps I'm mistaken, after all!" he growled, fiercely, "though but for that cracked voice, I'd swear I wasn't. Aha! me Judith Green, it's lucky I am not satisfied on that one point, for, was I, your life would pay the forfeit."

The remainder of the day dragged on, without particular incident, except that the feeling of antagonism against Kid Karl, gradually grew stronger, and now and then, the suggestive word "lynch," might be heard, among the miners who guarded the approach to the bar, with zealous care.

It became more than evident that if Kid Karl was put on trial again, he would not stand a ghost of a show, and the probabilities were that he would not be left unmolested, until such information should be elicited, giving positive proof whether Deadwood Dick was dead or alive.

About dusk, Masked Mose and McBride went to the latter's room, and locked themselves in. With a bottle and a lighted candle between them, they seated themselves at a rude table.

"No danger o' bein' heard here!" McBride said. "I asked old Argyle, an' he sed the rooms on either side o' us, were unoccupied. So steer ahead."

"Well, we've got to come to an understanding, what's to be done!" Masked Mose declared. "It won't do to delay any longer, or we may lose by it. In my opinion, 'tain't advisable for us to hang around here much longer!"

"Ye seem sorter skeery about somethin' or other!" McBride suggested.

"Not without cause, however. But that does not matter so much. I don't see anything gained by bothering further with Kid Karl. The miners will look well to it that he does not escape, and we may as well turn our attention to looking for the buried treasure. As experience has proved, we don't care particularly about fooling around the mine. It's a nest of hornets I'm skeery of stirring up again."

"D'ye think it's allies o' Deadwood Dick, w'ot's quartered there?"

"Most likely, though I'll swear they've not been there long."

"Do you think Deadwood Dick is really dead?"

"There can be no doubt of it. I fired—"

"Ha! you?"

Masked Mose laughed grimly.

"Well, yes, I, if you want to know it. I fired to kill, and I know the bullet went where it was intended to go. You see I had stumbled onto the mine, and found out who was working it, and all the particulars, except where Dick cached the ducats. I intended to shoot Leclède, too, but didn't get a pop at him until he arrived here, when I concluded to work the other racket on him. Somehow, I've made a bungle of it—but, I am satisfied that Deadwood Dick is dead, though the devil only knows what's become of his body!"

"I'm bettin' he's squirming yet," McBride protested. "I sorter feel it in my bones. An' ef he is, I pity you, fer they say he goes fer them as gives him a cold deal!"

"Say, rather, you pity Leclède—ha! ha! he'll catch the blame. No one happens to know who Masked Mose is."

"Well, what have you to propose?"

"Let me think a moment."

He tapped his foot on the floor—then, leaped to his feet, with a startled oath.

"What the devil ails you?" growled McBride, impatiently.

"Enough! By heavens, listen!"

Masked Mose stepped upon a board in the rough floor, that was not altogether fastened down, and there was a splash of water.

McBride turned whiter.

"The place is surrounded by water! Yes, and within half an hour, too. It is already floor high. Ha! ha! listen!"

The stentorian voice of Nick Norvell, old Argyle's nephew, was heard in the great main hall!

"Wide awake! wide awake!" he shouted. "Clear the building at once! The gulch is filling up, at the rate of a foot every five minutes!"

Fly for your lives. Any one who remains does so at the peril of his life, as this place will surely be swept away!"

It was an awful moment.

A moment, at least, never to be forgotten by those benighted citizens of Devil's Diggings.

An indiscriminate stampede was made from the building, and the greatest excitement and confusion prevailed.

In rushing from the building, the crowd went splashing knee-deep in water, and through this, in wild frenzy, they wallowed toward higher ground, in some of the lower depressions of the gulch sinking neck-deep, thereby eliciting hoarse and discordant yells.

The night was as dark as Stygia, and from some unaccountable cause the gulch was suddenly filling up with a literal ocean of water, which threatened to submerge all objects upon the bottom.

The rain poured down with relentless fury, thus adding to the terrors already encompassing the scene.

There seemed but one object among the habits of the Argyle—that was to escape to high ground.

In their room, after the first alarm, Masked Mose and McBride sat glaring at each other.

"Our time for business has come!" the former gritted. "Two persons must not leave this building?"

"Who?"

"Kid Karl, and Judith Green!"

"Good. Come!"

They glided from the room, up the stairs, and along the narrow hall, toward Kid Karl's room, which was upon the second floor.

McBride knew the number.

They reached the door and listened.

There was a series of hurried movements within.

Karl was preparing to evacuate.

Each door of a room in the Argyle was provided with bolts on the inside, and padlocks on the outside.

The lock and key to Karl's chamber hung in the staple outside the door.

With deft fingers, Masked Mose clapped the hasp over the staple, inserted the lock, and turned the key. Removing it, he placed it in his pocket.

Next they visited the apartment of Miss Judith Green, and repeated the action.

They were then about to return down-stairs, when they heard some one in another room.

"Ha! who's in there?"

"Lock it, anyhow!" McBride advised.

It was done; then they descended to the main hall.

The last person had just left it, and the lower part of the building was deserted, with the exception of the two ruffians.

There was a foot of water on the floor!

"We'd better get out!" Masked Mose admitted. "If we don't, we shall have to swim for it, and I'll swear I can't swim a stroke."

"Nor, hyer. We've time to take a smile-tho'," McBride said, wading to the bar, and beginning to pour down the liquor.

"Drink away, hog. I'll fire the place," Masked Mose exclaimed.

And he put the threat into execution by dashing several oil lamps to atoms against the walls, and touching lighted matches to the oil which trickled down, and igniting, burst into a mass of raging flame.

McBride during the day had soaked himself with liquor, and his deep potations now flew to his head, and he staggered out of the doomed building, en route for the mountains, nearly drowning before he reached safe footing.

He had scarcely left the Argyle, when a human figure leaped in through the open doorway, and Masked Mose turned to find himself confronted by Roaring Ruth, a pair of cocked revolvers in her grip.

At the same instant a great wave rushed in at the door, raising the water in the room to their belts.

"Quick! quick! To the stairway, or die here," the girl shrieked, frantically.

The ruffian obeyed, she close at his heels.

They mounted the stairs, but had barely reached the upper landing, when the great building tumbled, as from the jar of an earthquake.

A look of terror mantled the features of Masked Mose, and Ruth's face was very pale.

"Quick!" she gritted. "Not a moment is to be lost. The shebang will swing off her foundation in a moment. Unlock the doors you locked!"

"Curse you, no!"

"Obey me, or I'll kill you where you stand."

With a growl he took the keys from his pocket, and flung them at her feet—then, with a terrible oath, dashed through an open window out into the wild, watery abyss below.

The lights were still burning in the upper halls.

Ruth expected every minute to feel the building swing off its foundation.

At the front end of the hall she saw jets of flame darting up through the cracks in the floor, seemingly endeavoring to reach the roof.

The prisoners in the rooms were vainly trying to burst open the doors.

For an instant Roaring Ruth stood like one dazed, so fast had the exciting events crowded upon her; then, seizing the keys, she uttered a cheering cry, and ran to the rescue.

The first door she opened, and Jefferson Jackson stepped forth!

Without pausing for breath, she ran on to the others, and in the time it takes to tell it, the doors were unlocked, and Kid Karl and Judith Green were free.

"May the Master above reward you for your heroism, Roaring Ruth!" Jefferson Jackson said reverently, as the quartette for a moment huddled together.

And the others echoed the words.

"There's no time for gratitude now," the daring girl answered. "I fear we are doomed as it is, for the water is high up to the second story, and the building will be swept away. To attempt to swim to high ground will be as good as saying good-by to this world. Our only chance is to get on the roof and wait till the building is dashed against the rocks—then jump for our lives. It's a terrible risk, but our only chance!"

"You are correct!" Jackson declared. "It's our only chance! Leclède, you look to Miss Green, and I'll do all in my power to assist Miss Ruth. Where can we reach the roof?"

They soon found a trap-door and gained the ridge of the roof in safety.

At one end of the gable the flames were already bursting forth, and reflected with horrible realism upon the furious flood below.

If the building did not soon swing off, the house-top prisoners were in danger of being burned, should they prefer that rather than the fate of drowning in the angry waters below.

At a considerable distance away—further than they had ever seemed before—the mountains loomed up like mocking monsters.

Nothing could be seen of the escaped miners, but above the roar of the waters came their discordant cries.

In spite of the rain the flames were eating rapidly into one end of the roof, and gradually lighting up the night and its wildly picturesque scene.

Ah!

A great surge of waters—a spasmodic trembling, then—

The Argyle slowly rose upon the waters from its foundation, and like a mighty thing of life moved majestically away with the current—away to certain destruction against the rocky narrows of the gulch below, bearing upon its roof four pale and horrified human beings, the terrified expressions of whose faces was vividly betrayed by the light of the burning roof!

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE MINE.

Two weeks had passed.

The flood had subsided to a great extent, but the bottom of the gulch was considered no safe place to rebuild a town.

The miners who had escaped from the ill-fated Argyle, had scattered in many directions, and but few remained of the former citizens of Devil's Diggings.

These few had struck a streak of paying ore, up in a mountain pocket, and there daily delved, until news should reach them of some better "find."

Of the whole number—there were a dozen only, left. Of these, Jake McBride was captain-in-chief, of course, for there were now no Kid Karls or Roaring Ruths to dispute his authority.

Besides McBride, the camp population included old Jonas Argyle, who, by having most of his money in an Eastern bank, lost but little by the flood, except his buildings and their furnishings; Dutch Jake, Judge Tamarack Splinter, who had descended from the bench to the pick and pan, through need of money; Satan, the former barkeeper; Jerry, Roaring Ruth's

burro, who was counted a good citizen, and half a dozen miners, whose names it is needless here to mention.

A temporary cabin had been thrown together, and formed the camp proper.

In the day the grim dozen worked at the pick; at night they slept in the cabin.

It was a sort of monotonous existence, which these few remnants of the Diggings's past glory, seemed loth to give up, until some boom should break them into a stampede.

A search for the Deadwood Dick mine, under the guidance of McBride, had been instituted on half a dozen different occasions, but without finding it.

As a matter of opinion, there could be but two ways about it:—either the storm-wash of the mountain had so transformed the topographic features of the locality of the former entrance to the mine, that McBride really could not find it, or—

On each occasion he had led the searching party on the wrong trail, knowing at the time, exactly where the mine was located.

This latter theory, if it had gained any credence among the miners, was carefully suppressed from their utterances, for, as a general rule, they feared the burly gambler, who, since the flood, had grown more savage and brutal than before; then, too, he might in an unguarded moment betray himself.

But McBride seldom left the camp, and when he did, it was but for half an hour at a time, when he invariably returned with game for their table; so that, if he was holding the secret, he was doing it well.

There were two men in the camp who, while not appearing to do so, kept a vigilant eye upon the ruffian. One was Jonas Argyle, the other was Dutch Dave, Roaring Ruth's former companion.

The latter, in particular, seemed to regard the gambler with no good will.

There were three beings in the camp who seemed more gloomy than the rest—Jonas Argyle, Dutch Dave, and Jerry, the burro.

The loss of the Argyle, which had swept away one quartette of precious lives, seemed to be the chief cause of their sorrow.

And what, the reader will ask, was the fate of the four house-top prisoners?

At the mountain camp, after a tedious but earnest search had been made, a verdict was rendered: "Roaring Ruth, Kid Karl, Judith Green and Jeff Jackson came to their death by drowning."

The fate of Masked Mose no one knew. All that McBride could tell was that he last saw him in the Argyle.

But few pieces of the hotel were found, although miles of the gulch were searched—and no clues leading to the fate of the house-top prisoners.

To follow the thread of our narrative, after a few necessary explanations, it now becomes our duty to pursue the floating hotel—a spectacle to be seen, probably, but once in a lifetime.

Proudly the great building swept away, very little of the upper story being submerged; so that nearly the whole structure was carried along on the surface.

It rounded the bend nicely, and dashed on toward the narrows half a mile below, through which it could not pass without either going to pieces or becoming wedged in.

On—on!

The prisoners nerved themselves, and prepared for the leap for life—a leap of uncertainty and extreme danger.

The opportunity soon came.

The Argyle went driving furiously between the beetling, jagged rocks with a deafening crash. There was a cracking and creaking, a breaking and splitting of timbers; then the wreck of Devil's Diggings's once pretentious hostelry was borne on in pieces.

Upon a ledge of rocks above the roaring torrent three persons stood safe and unharmed.

They were Kid Karl, Roaring Ruth, and Judith Green.

Jefferson Jackson was not with them.

They stood for some moments, in terrified awe and grateful prayer.

Then Karl spoke:

"Poor Jackson! I fear he was not as lucky as we. Undoubtedly he leaped too late, and is lost!"

"He was at my side but an instant before I leaped," Ruth cried. "We must make a search."

A diligent search was made but no trace of Jefferson Jackson could be found.

"We might as well give it up!" Kid Karl fin-

ally said. "I can easily find our way to Deadwood Dick's mine, and we had best go there at once."

"Are you not afraid he has men there? You know what sort of a reception McBride and Masked Mose got."

"I can explain that. There were two trusty Pawnee red-skins, who used to bring us meat, and guard the mine, when we were both away. They probably were there, when the ruffians tried to enter the mine, and recognizing them as enemies, drove them off. Come! I'll guarantee all will be right."

They followed him, and in due time, the mouth of the mine was reached.

Then, leaving Ruth and Judith outside, Kid Karl entered the dark fissure.

He was gone but a few minutes, when he returned, accompanied by another person.

To their astonishment, the girls beheld and recognized Jefferson Jackson!

"Ladies!" Kid Karl said, "if you will step into the mine, I have something to explain."

Wonderingly they entered the great cavern, where numerous camp fires were burning.

Around some of them were grouped a lot of masked men, numbering perhaps two score.

"Ladies!" Kid Karl announced, "I will surprise you with a discovery I have just made, myself. This gentleman, Jefferson Jackson, who reached this place in advance of us, is the man whom it is claimed I attempted to murder—Deadwood Dick!"

"I suspected as much!" Ruth muttered, while Judith looked her surprise, as the famous ex-Prince of the Road removed his disguise, and turned his handsome face toward them.

"This gentleman, Deadwood Dick, is not positively assured that I did not attempt to assassinate him; therefore, I propose to prove my innocence. With that honorable liberality characteristic of his nature, he has freely offered to make me his equal partner again, when I prove myself the man he always thought me. He has placed the mine at your disposal, as a place of safety, until you choose to go elsewhere. And, now, hoping to find you here on my return, I will speak a word with Miss Green, and bid you *au revoir*."

He took Judith one side, and they held a short consultation—then, Kid Karl took his departure.

"How did you escape, that night when I left you for dead?" Roaring Ruth demanded of Dick.

"I will explain," he said, "I was not wounded half as bad as I supposed. The bullet never harmed me, mortally. It was a case of suspended animation brought on of course by the bullet shock and excitement and loss of blood. When I recovered, I left a paper, which you found. I left it as an indirect way of informing you that I was alive. Later, I played the ghost, hoping the ruse would result in preventing people from visiting this vicinity of the mountain."

"And your buried treasure?"

"Is still safe."

"Who are these men in masks?"

"Why, they are a party of fellows who were formerly the road-agents of one Ramon Ravec, who deserted them, carrying away all their plunder. The band is now disorganized, and I have given them shelter until they can get a chance to escape to their homes. Some of them, I believe, have expressed a desire to remain here and work in the mine."

"Ramon Ravec?" Judith cried.

"Ramon—Ramon Ravec!" gasped Roaring Ruth. "Why, what do you know of him?"

And she turned to Judith, in eager surprise.

"All I want to!" was the reply. "For a long time, until yesterday, I have been a prisoner in his retreat. I do not know how long, for he told me I had lost my reason for awhile. He stole me from somewhere, but I know not where, or how long ago. My memory of the past is gone—alas! gone."

The rose-color had all left the face of Ruth, but the eager expression was still in her luminous orbs.

"Speak!" she cried—"do you not know your name—your own true name?"

"No! no! I have often tried, in the past few days, but could not recall it."

"Nor your parents?"

"No! I cannot remember even them?"

"Please remove those goggles. Some subtle instinct tells me that I know you. Oh! Heaven, can it be possible—yes, I feel that it is! Royal! Royal! do you not know me—your sister, Bethel Brainard?"

Judith tore away the goggles, and gazed into the face of the other, searchingly—then, an un-

mistakable light of recognition dawned over her face, and she rushed forward, gasping:

"Bethel! Bethel! God be praised, I do remember you. And, now, oh! yes, comes back the scene of the outlaws attacking our home—and, father—I see him now!"

Further words were unspoken, just then, for the two strangely reunited sisters were sobbing in each other's embrace.

Later, Bethel, otherwise Roaring Ruth, explained how Ravec and a band of border ruffians had attacked the Brainard home, killing father and mother and carrying off one of the sisters. She, Bethel, had taken the trail of vengeance, swearing to avenge the untimely fate of her parents, and to rescue Roya.

"In all but one thing you have succeeded," Roya spoke up. "You will probably never see Ramon Ravec again."

"Why?"

"Because he doubtless perished in the flood. He was Masked Mose."

"Why, then, did you not betray him into the hands of justice?"

"Because I hoped some day to learn of him of my shadowed past."

Roya also explained that she had discovered the mine, weeks before, and at every opportunity had stealthily visited it, and watched Dick and Leclède at work—particularly the latter, for whom she had formed a fancy.

Days passed by, and the two girls remained the guests of Deadwood Dick, awaiting the return of Kid Karl.

Two weeks passed.

Yet he came not.

Roya began to show disappointment.

Not so with Roaring Ruth.

In Deadwood Dick she had found an ideal suited to her own fearless nature.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

As the flood had washed away all the available liquid refreshments from Devil's Diggings, barring that commonplace beverage known as water, the dozen miners in the lone mountain pocket had none; in consequence, the men grew surly and unsociable, and it was evident nothing could restore Camp McBride to anything like a pleasant state short of a couple of gallons of bug-juice. Nearly all the miners had been regular and hard drinkers, and they missed their "moistening," the same as a horse misses its oats.

Therefore, when, one noonday, just as they were about quitting work, the miners spied a man sitting on a bowlder, watching them, with a two-gallon demijohn between his legs, they set up a yell, and made for him pell-mell, McBride, like a famished wolf, in advance.

As they drew nigh, they somewhat slackened their pace, for they saw a pair of large six-shooters leveled at them.

The man who held them was a comical-looking person, yet, withal, a typical miner. His hair was of a startling reddish hue, while a short, thick-matted beard of a like color covered nearly all of his face. His garments were coarse and mud-splashed, and he bore every evidence of having just come out of the mines.

"Whoa up, thar—steady, by jerks, ef ye don't want to git afflicted wi' a case o' genywine corruption o' ther heart! What ails ye, ye 'tarnal fools?"

"What hev ye in that jug?" McBride demanded, hoarsely.

"What's that yer bizness?" the stranger retorted, coolly. "D'ye run my apple-cart, or do I—which?"

"I'll cursed soon run it, ef ye don't keep a civil tongue in yer head!" the gambler replied, savagely. "See hyer, redhead, ef ye've got lik'er in that jug, we hain't hed a smell in a fortnight, an' we want heave down a hoss-load."

"Hain't hed no p'izen in a fortnight, d'ye say? Why, lor' bless yer souls, that's redickerlus. Sail up, an' smile at the moist humor ov yer uncle, Ben Sargent. I ain't no hog—not I, you bet!"

And Benjamin uncorked the demijohn, and set it down upon the ground, with a ludicrous grin.

"I allers like to see a feller hev some life in him, tho' thet ile came cl'ar from Pineville, a la tote, an' aire mighty expensive."

"Where d'ye belong?" McBride demanded, after taking a strong pull

"Oh! bin prospectin', all overs. Didn't hev any idea any one lived 'round these parts. But, I say, thet demy' war heavy—what d'ye say ter givin' a feller a squar meal?"

"Ye shall hev it in earnest; and, what's more, we'll lighten yer jug so it won't be so heavy to carry when you go on," McBride facetiously answered.

The other miners prevailed upon Redhead, as he was generally dubbed, to tarry with them, until at least a portion of his good cheer was dispensed.

At first, Mr. Benjamin Sargent showed up rather bashful, but after the day had worn on, and he had had several drinks of his own "p'izen," his tongue seemed to get loosened, and McBride was enabled to "pump" him to a considerable degree.

No, he had not struck it rich; in fact, was not able to truthfully say that he had struck it at all. Was disgusted with prospecting, and if luck didn't soon change he should turn his hand to something that would better his finances.

Would he be over-particular and scrupulous as to what was the nature of the job as long as it yielded big pay?

No, he couldn't say as he would ef he saw the money in hand.

There was no work for the balance of that day.

The miners drank deeply, and as night drew on, they became conspicuously drowsy, and one by one fell off into a sound sleep.

Old Jonas Argyle and Dutch Dave did not imbibe of the liquor, for a peculiar sign from Redhead had warned them to let the stuff alone, although to keep up appearances, they made a feint of drinking occasionally.

McBride having drank deeper than the rest was among the first to fall asleep.

By a little after dusk, there were but three wakeful persons in the cabin, and those who were asleep were in no danger of being easily awakened.

They were powerfully drugged.

"The thing has worked, first-class!" Benjamin Sargent said, turning to old Argyle. "Couldn't be helped, to carry out my plans."

"Who are you?" Argyle demanded.

"Kid Karl!" and he threw aside the false beard and hair.

"And the others?"

"Safe, up in the mountain mine."

Argyle was silent a moment, then, he said:

"Young man, I have taken a strange and perhaps unwarranted interest in you, since our first meeting, and I must speak, now that I have an opportunity. Tell me—do you know who your parents were?"

"Yes. My father was John Karl, a Canadian, who hunted and trapped for a living. My mother, I did not know. She died when I was too young to remember."

"But, her name—you must remember that?"

"I do. It was Miranda!"

"Great Heaven! then, after all, my suspicions are not unfounded. Speak, boy—have you a birth mark—a scarlet arrow upon your arm, near the shoulder?"

"There is, indeed!" Kid Karl replied, in surprise. "Why do you ask?"

"Because, I am your father!"

"My father?"

"Ay, your father!" and there were tears in the old man's eyes. "I can explain to you. Years ago, I, a hunter, rescued a white girl from the Indians, named Miranda Stone. Her parents were dead, and I adopted, and eventually married her. You were the issue of our marriage. When you were a year old I was made captive by the Indians, and taken many hundred miles from my home. For ten years, I was a forced member of a wild warlike band of Sioux, and when I finally escaped to my former home, I found there a thriving village. All I could ever learn of Miranda, was, that after mourning me as dead, for three years, she married a trapper, and they moved to the far frontier. Since first seeing you, some subtle instinct has told me that you were my boy!"

"Then, it must be so, father, and as a son, I warmly welcome you!" Kid Karl said, folding the old man in his embrace.

"Py shimminy gracious, I vonder off somepodies don'd vas pe magin' out dot I vas der father off some odder poddies, vot pe deadt, dese forty year?" Dutch Dave muttered, in astonishment.

After the greetings between father and son were over, Kid Karl said:

"Now, I have work to be done, here, yet, and we must all fall into a semblance of repose, like the others. I expect Masked Mose to visit

the camp, at almost any moment, and mean to capture him."

To speak was to act, and shortly all parties in the cabin were apparently in deepest slumber.

Kid Karl had not estimated, wrongly. For days he had been shadowing the movements of Masked Mose, alias Ramon Ravec, and had formed an idea that the outlaw would visit the miners' camp that night, to seek an interview with McBride.

And so he did.

The evening was not more than half advanced when Masked Mose boldly entered the cabin.

He started back, first, on seeing the sleeping miners; then, uttered a loud laugh, as he beheld the empty demijohn.

"Drunk as a pack of loons, I'll swear," he muttered. "I presume there's little use o' trying to stir up McBride. He never gets drunk but he gets paralyzed, the glutton!"

"Stand, Masked Mose! Stir an inch, and you are a dead man!"

It was Kid Karl's ringing voice that uttered the challenge—Kid Karl's hands that held a pair of polished death-tubes leveled toward the outlaw.

There was no mistaking the meaning of his stern command; and when Ravec saw Dutch Dave and old Argyle also cover him with their weapons, he uttered a savage growl, not unlike that of a baffled tiger.

"What d'ye want?" he demanded, with a string of oaths.

"I want you!" Karl replied promptly. "You attempted to assassinate Deadwood Dick, hoping to get possession of the gold. You falsely charged me with the crime; and now, sir, you have got to clear me, in the presence of him whom you would have killed!"

Karl looked so stern and spoke so vengefully that the outlaw made no attempt to deny his crime.

"So Deadwood Dick still lives?" he gritted.

"Yes."

"An' ye want me to go before him, an' say ye didn't shoot him an' that I did?"

"Precisely that, sir!"

"I'll be cussed if I do!"

"Then you die here!"

"Better by your hand than his!" Ravec growled.

He evidently knew he was safe in saying this.

And he gained the point.

"You shall go with me!" Karl said. "I will make you inducements to do so. Go to the mine with me, and into the presence of Deadwood Dick, and there declare your guilt, and my innocence, and I promise you neither he, I, these gentlemen, or Roaring Ruth, shall hinder you from taking your departure."

"I acknowledge here, that I attempted to kill Deadwood Dick, but I won't go before him!" was the stubborn reply.

"That is quite as satisfactory, here, as it would be, elsewhere!" a voice cried, and Deadwood Dick stepped into the room, followed by Ravec's former band. "I freely withdraw my claims against you, Ramon Ravec, in favor of these gentlemen!"

In vain Masked Mose made a desperate attempt to escape. His sands of luck had ebbed out; he was seized and dragged out into the night and borne away, no one knew where, except the grim, determined men who had him in charge.

What was his fate no one knew—few cared, if any.

He was never heard of again, nor were the men who were doubtless the cause of his death.

But few word are necessary in closing:

Deadwood Dick did not work his mine much longer, but turned it over as a present to Kid Karl, who, with Roya, his wife, now live there, together with a band of sturdy miners.

Dick's wild, restless nature and roving inclinations would not admit of his remaining longer in that region, and he set out in quest of fresh fields of adventure, under new auspices and with a new purpose.

Not long after his departure Roaring Ruth and her burro also left the mines. Wise ones said the girl was smitten with the ex-Prince of the Road and had gone in search of him.

Judge Splinter and Jonas Argyle remained with Kid and Roya, as did Dutch Dave, while Jake McBride left that region to meet a tragic death in a mine-explosion near Buena Vista.

THE END.

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